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SERMONS,

BY

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ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH, AND
PROFESSOR OF LOGIC AND METAPHYSICS IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

AN ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF THE AUTHOR.

SECOND EDITION.

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AN ACCOUNT
OF THE
LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF
JAMES FINLAYSON, D. D.

IN a mixed company, when the general attention is claimed by a stranger, we naturally inquire who he is: and although it may be difficult to obtain a ready answer in his presence, yet the difficulty ceases as soon as he retires. When the information to be communicated is favourable, those, who happen to be qualified, are eager to impart it, and to augment our satisfaction by the assurance, that we have been listening to one who is, in every view, worthy of attention. A similar desire is felt to know some particulars of the life and character of those who address us from the Pulpit, the Chair, or the Press; and to gratify the curiosity which the present publication may excite, is an office which the writer of this memoir finds^a

b gratification

gratification in performing. His report can be made without pain, for it is highly favourable; and without indelicacy, for alas! the subject of it has quitted the scene, where he might have been embarrassed by his own eulogium.

The following biographical sketch was originally prepared for a different work, where it has already appeared: but the editors of this volume having honoured it with their approbation, and expressed a desire, that it should form a part of the contents, he has yielded to their desire, though not without some apprehension of appearing unqualified to do full justice to his subject. With the few materials which it required, he was sufficiently furnished by a long and attentive acquaintance with Dr. Finlayson; but he is conscious that these might have been employed, with superior effect, in the hands of some one, whose professional pursuits were more congenial with those, in a description of which the narrative must principally consist. His incompetency in this respect, however, may perhaps be balanced by that impartiality, which
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ought to be its consequence. The greater his separation from Dr Finlayson in the business of life, the more credit he may expect to his fidelity in the delineation of a character commanding his regard and admiration by its excellence alone.

The author of the Sermons now offered to the public, was Professor of Logic in the University of Edinburgh; and one of the ministers of the High Church of that city. In this double capacity, he was intrusted with duties of no ordinary importance; the former giving him the direction of academical youth, at their outset in scientific enquiries; and the latter requiring him to conduct the devotions of the most dignified congregation in the metropolis of Scotland. His preferments, however, would not have been sufficient for entitling him to the distinction of a biographical notice, had they not served to bring into view a combination of endowments, which the unambitious modesty of their possessor would, in stations of less activity and eminence, probably have left unexerted and unknown.

Dr Finlayson was one of the few who become conspicuous without struggling to be so; and who, by a strict and steady discharge of the present duty, silently and unconsciously suggest their claim to advancement. It may be safely asserted that in all the steps by which he rose to the head of his profession, the idea of a change never originated with himself, but with patrons, who, in extending the sphere of his services, acted from an honourable desire to promote the public advantage.

He was born on the 15th of February 1758, at the farm of Nether Cambushenie, in the parish of Dunblane, where his ancestors had been settled for several centuries. His parents, both of whom have survived him, are persons of much worth, and possessed of a respectable provision which he took care to increase. After passing some time with a maternal uncle at Lecropt, he was sent to the school of Kinbuck, in his father's neighbourhood, and about the age of ten, removed to that of Dunblane. At this period, the natural energy of his spirit shewed itself in such an uncommon degree of liveliness,

liveliness, as made him be put at the head of every boyish frolick, from the same perception, in his early companions, of that force and decision of character, which afterwards induced others tacitly to invite his direction of more serious affairs. But his ardour in pursuits, requiring only bodily activity, of which it may surprise the associates of his sedater years to be informed, did not prevent him from shewing equal ardour and activity of mind, in the hours of study. Having made rapid and remarkable proficiency at school, he began his studies in the university of Glasgow at the age of fourteen; and, during the summer vacations employed himself in instructing his younger brothers at home. He was afterwards, for two years, engaged in teaching the children of Mrs Campbell of Carie, and having dedicated a summer to private study, acted in the same capacity with the family of Mr Cowper of Glasgow. He next became *amanuensis* to Professor Anderson: and, in 1782, returned to the duties of a preceptor, by taking charge of two sons of Sir William Murray of Ochtertyre, baronet. In this intelligent gentleman he

found a patron and friend, who, by his penetration, was enabled to appreciate, and, by his taste, to enjoy the peculiar value of Mr Finlayson, as a domestic companion. Sir William had a turn and capacity for speculation, particularly on subjects of political economy, which he derived much satisfaction from discussing with the young philosopher. In such discussions, the latter could not fail to distinguish himself by his acute and discriminating understanding, the fulness and arrangement of his information, the clearness and comprehension of his ideas, the tenacious minuteness of his memory, the logical strength of his judgment, and the conciseness and perspicuity of his expression. His natural good sense too supplied that propriety of manner, which, in most cases, is only to be acquired by early and habitual intercourse with superiors; and which prevented him equally from obtruding, or, when it was obviously invited, from withholding his conversation. Such invitations are too often abused, by the injudicious vanity of rustic genius, which is apt, when flattered by encouragement, to transgress
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the limits, that more judgment or experience would perceive to be implied in the invitation; and the great are frequently compelled to deny themselves the pleasure, which they would take in its display, from a fear of its forgetting those rules, by a breach of which their gratification would be too dearly purchased. But with Mr Finlayson they were perfectly secure; as no man was ever more absolutely free from inconsiderate conceit; or more delicately and intuitively alive to a sense of what was respectively due to others and to himself; qualities which, with his discerning superiors, must have given double value to his society. Possessing few exterior graces of manner and address, he shewed his wisdom by making no pretensions to them; and by contenting himself with that negative plainness and propriety of behaviour, which seldom captivated, and never offended. Simplicity was the leading characteristic of his deportment; for as he had nothing, on the other hand, of fashionable elegance or professional pomp, he was equally distant, on the other from the awkwardness of pedantry and the coarseness of vulgarity.

There is reason to believe that his merits were, in every respect, justly estimated by the worthy baronet, with whom it was now his good fortune to be connected; and that this connection was gradually improved into a warm and mutual personal regard; leading, on one side, to a zealous desire for the comfort and success of its object, and, on the other, to a manly and respectful gratitude.

With the family of Sir William Murray, Mr Finlayson removed to Edinburgh, and there had the advantage of renewing his studies at the University, and an opportunity of comparing its institutions and plan of instruction with those under which he had been originally educated. In 1785 he received a license to preach, which, in Scotland, confers a title to perform a certain portion of the clerical duties without ordination. The earliest of his appearances in the pulpit were such as might be expected from his previous diligence. The composition of his sermons gave evidence of the maturity and manliness of his understanding. They exhibited no juvenile splendour
of

of language, no straining for original or unexpected remarks; no ambition of refined or recondite ingenuity. The subjects were judiciously chosen; and the most instructive and intelligible treatment of them preferred. His reasoning was cogent and correct; his illustrations rational and just; and his style, which neither courted nor rejected ornament, was classically pure and appropriate. His manner was still less florid than his diction. He carried to the pulpit the same unpretending simplicity, with which he appeared in society; and from his care to avoid affectation, and all rhetorical attempts of doubtful success, he might, to the undiscerning, have some appearance of coldness. But by those who felt such an interest in the matter, as was due to its excellence, no defect of energy or animation in the manner was observable. If it had no artificial decoration, it had no offensive meanness. As a preacher Dr Finlayson was very nearly what Cowper describes in the following lines:

Simple, grave, sincere;

In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain;
 And plain in manner. Decent, solemn, chaste,
 And natural in gesture.

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The excellence of his sermons soon pointed him out, as one of the rising hopes of his profession ; and was probably the motive of the late Dr Hardy, when laid aside, for some months, by indisposition, to intrust him with the performance of his public duty, in the High Church of Edinburgh. He thus became the temporary colleague of Dr Blair, and obtained an early introduction to the favour of that respectable audience, with whom he was afterwards to enjoy a more intimate and durable connection, and to whom the first as well as the last of his pastoral exertions was devoted.

In summer 1785 Dr Finlayson received an offer of the living of Dunkeld, which, as he had no prospect, and therefore no ambition, beyond the situation of a country clergyman, he was disposed to accept. But on communicating his intention to Sir William Murray, he was induced to relinquish it, by the information that an arrangement was proposed, for procuring him the professorship of logic in the University of Edinburgh. As this office was most happily adapted to the peculiar qualifications of Mr Finlayson, he looked towards

wards it with an eagerness and ambition to which he had hitherto been a stranger ; and during the negotiation, which did not proceed so smoothly as had been expected, felt his quiet impaired, by the anxiety of suspense, and by a conflict between the keenness of his anticipations, and the correction of his understanding. This state of mind he described, in a series of letters to his present biographer, during the summer of 1786, when the failure of his hopes appeared so probable, that, to secure himself against it, he accepted the living of Borthwick, which had been procured for him by Sir William Murray. “ Two “ years ago,” he says, “ such a situation “ was the highest wish I had formed on “ earth ; but since that time an accident “ gave my thoughts a different direction ; “ and this direction has been gradually “ confirmed into habit, by a succession of “ events, over which I had no control. “ And when that object is about to be “ torn from me, it is not in man to be “ composed.” On the 23d of October, he wrote as if his disappointment had been certain, but, before concluding the letter, his

his doubts were removed, by an intimation that the affair was at last so far arranged, as to render it proper that he should, during the approaching winter, execute the duties of the absent Professor ; “ which ” he “ adds, may be considered, from the short “ time left for preparation, as matter of “ condolence, rather than of congratula- “ tion.”

The time indeed, as the session opened about a fortnight after, was extremely short, and though his studies had probably been, for some months, guided by his expectations, yet, when we consider the harrassed situation of his mind, and the necessity he was under of devoting the small remaining interval, to prepare for his ordination and settlement at Borthwick, the credit and ability, with which he discharged the duties of his chair, bear testimony to the vigour of his talents, and the severity of his application. Though every day obliged to write a lecture for the next, yet so ready was his knowledge, and so accurate his composition, that many of these original lectures served him, without transcription, to the end of his life. His exertions were the more meritorious, as he had
had

had yet no absolute certainty of deriving from them any permanent advantage: for his appointment to the chair, of which he had, at this time, only an interim possession, depended on the resignation of the professor, who was then abroad, and whose intentions had not been explicitly declared.

About the beginning of 1787, he was ordained minister of the parish of Borthwick; and in the succeeding summer, added to his other labours a course of parochial visitation, which had been discontinued in that parish for upwards of thirty years. This practice he resumed, as he informed the narrator, by the recommendation of the celebrated Dr Robertson, who probably thought it more incumbent on a clergyman in the country than in a city, where parochial distinctions are but little attended to. But the sedentary confinement and exhausting fatigue, to which he was subjected by these complicated occupations, must have materially injured his constitution; for, though to his ordinary acquaintance he had the appearance of unimpaired and steady health, his parents, whose observa-

tion

tion would be more anxiously minute, refer to this date, and to these causes, certain ailments of the stomach, with which he had never before been affected.

During the subsequent winter, he had renewed his exertions with unabated diligence, as appears from the following extract of a letter to his friend, dated the 12th May, 1788. “ I am now enjoying the luxury of
 “ ease after a month of very hard labour.
 “ In consequence of taking a separate hour
 “ for examining my students, I found use
 “ for between twenty and thirty additional
 “ lectures. These, from an unpardonable
 “ degree of indolence, I had neglected to
 “ prepare, until the spur of necessity
 “ touched me. The greater part of them
 “ belonged to the last branch of my course,
 “ which is ‘ The means of communicating
 “ truth’, and were on the origin and pro-
 “ gress of language, on the principles of
 “ universal grammar, &c. I have project-
 “ ed about six more on style, and on the
 “ best method of arranging and conducting
 “ a discourse, for the purpose of producing
 “ conviction. These will complete my
 “ plan

“ plan, and leave me at leisure to turn my
“ attention to the improvement of those
“ hasty sketches, which I have hitherto
“ made. This summer I devote to the
“ History of Philosophy. If indolence and
“ sermon-making permit me, I mean to
“ write that branch of the course anew,
“ and to throw into it a greater degree of
“ order, and of knowledge, than I was
“ formerly able to do.

About a year after the date of this letter, he was disturbed by a report, that the Professor, whose place he had for three years supplied, was disposed to reclaim his situation and resume its duties ; but his apprehensions were speedily put to rest by a final arrangement, and he found himself sole and undisputed possessor of the chair. As soon as he felt his security complete, a delicate sense of duty made him propose to resign his living, and he was induced to retain it, only at the request of the Patron, who, by this time, had discovered the value of such a neighbour. He was indeed rising into reputation with a rapidity, which may appear unaccountable, when we consider
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his total want of ostentation, and his ignorance or neglect of that address, by which the artful contrive to make the most of their peculiar merit, and industriously create opportunities for displaying their fairest qualities, while the rest are left in the shade. To all this stage-trick of vanity, Mr Finlayson was an absolute stranger; and it is difficult to say whether his disdain or unfitness for it was greatest. He never solicited public notice, unless by the quiet and conscientious discharge of his duties. Though his good deeds were numerous, they were secret; and though his temper was social, and his conversation improving, it had little of that brilliancy, or point, or power of general captivation, which seem necessary to spread the literary fame of a man, who declines to court it through the press. His reputation was created by the exactness of his information, the accuracy of his opinions, and his talent for that patient and minute enquiry on which they rested. These useful endowments were quickly perceived by those with whom he acted, particularly in his clerical capacity; and on the judgment of this young counselor,

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lor, the most experienced sages of the church were not ashamed to repose, in various questions of ecclesiastical policy. To justify the respect which was paid to his advice, and the frequency with which it was solicited, he dedicated much of his leisure to study the laws, constitution, and history of the Scottish Church, and began to take an active part in the details of its political government. This, by extending his acquaintance and consideration among the clergy, made him gradually lean more to the ecclesiastical, than to the literary, department of his functions. Though constant in the study of every branch of knowledge, yet from the society he preferred, and the objects he pursued, he became more of a clergyman, than a mere man of letters; and though literature may regret this direction of his talents, it was of essential benefit to the body in whose favour it was chosen. Could a collection be made of his correspondence with clergymen, in every corner of the kingdom, who had resorted to him for advice, it would probably form the ablest digest and interpretation of the laws, and the safest guide in the administration

of the Church, which have yet appeared. His partiality to the clerical character was also, in one respect, productive of advantage to his students; as it prevented him from dreading the charge of an unfashionable fanaticism, or an approach to preaching inconsistent with his eminence in secular literature, for maintaining in the chair the truth and importance of that religion which he taught in the pulpit. He was even studious of taking every fair opportunity to draw his illustrations from Christianity; and thus kept its principles alive in the mind of youth, at a period when they are too apt to decline.

While thus advancing in reputation, it was natural to expect that he should speedily be removed to a living in Edinburgh; where, from its being the metropolitan seat of that great corporation, which is formed by the North British Church, men of inclination and ability to conduct ecclesiastical affairs can be of the most effectual and extensive service. This change he seems himself to have anticipated, by the following expressions in a letter dated the 2d of April

1788 :

1788: " I can give you no information
" concerning the intentions of the Town-
" council of Edinburgh respecting myself.
" Common report says they are favourable;
" but report is an unsafe reed to lean on. No
" application has been made to any of its
" members in my behalf. At the same time
" I think it not altogether improbable, that
" they may give me a removal, in the course
" of a year or two.

He was accordingly translated in 1790 to Lady Yester's church; and, on the vacancy occasioned by the death of Dr Robertson, was, in 1793, removed to the collegiate church of Old Grayfriars. Here his preferment might have been expected to terminate; but there still remained a single step of professional elevation, and this it was also his lot to attain. The High church of Edinburgh, being graced by the attendance of the Magistrates, Judges, and Royal Commissioner, who appear in it with official solemnity, has always been deemed pre-eminent in dignity: and the Magistrates, who are patrons, being scrupulously anxious to have it properly filled, except it from the

rules which they generally observe in supplying the rest. A vacancy here having occurred in 1799, they chose Mr Finlayson as the person most likely to do credit to the situation ; and their judgment was confirmed by the unanimous voice of the public, and especially of those dignified characters who formed part of the congregation.

In his new office, he had the satisfaction of being associated with his amiable and distinguished friend Dr Blair ; who, though now laid aside, by age and infirmity, from the performance of his public duty, was honourably employed in closing a long, a virtuous, and an illustrious life, by preparing a fifth volume of sermons for the press. The MSS of these sermons, wholly written by the hand of their author, in his 82d year, Mr Finlayson solicited from the printers, and carefully preserved them, as a literary curiosity, splendidly bound, and pre-faced with a suitable inscription.

But this pleasing connection was dissolved, in less than a year from its commencement, by the death of his venerable colleague,

league, whose funeral sermon he preached on the following Sunday. The latter part of this discourse he afterwards published at the close of a short memoir of the life of Dr Blair, annexed to the posthumous volume of his sermons.

The misfortune sustained by Mr Finlayson, in the loss of his celebrated colleague received all the alleviation, of which it was susceptible, from the appointment of one of his most early and intimate friends to supply the vacancy. Human life has few greater comforts to bestow, than finding those, with whom we had been strictly and confidentially connected in its outset, after various separations, rejoin us as we advance, with the prospect of travelling the remainder of the way, in their company. Of this comfort Mr Finlayson had the full enjoyment; for though his journey was nearer its close, than might naturally have been expected, he had the satisfaction of performing it in uninterrupted union with the companion of his youth; of being watched by his tender assiduity, in his departing moments; and of confiding to his execution the last wishes of his heart.

Not long after the completion of this satisfactory arrangement, he was dignified by the University of Edinburgh with the degree of D. D. : and, in 1802, he received the highest testimony of respect, which the Church of Scotland can bestow upon her members, by being elected Moderator or President of the General Assembly.

After this advancement to the only species of Primacy, consistent with the spirit and structure of Presbyterian polity, the life of Dr Finlayson proceeded in its usual tenour ; marked by few events, and managed with much attention to the frugal and judicious distribution of his time. Though the chief part of every day was devoted to study, yet his evenings were, frequently spent in the exercise or enjoyment of hospitality. He had an extensive acquaintance among people of various ranks and descriptions. He uniformly maintained a liberal intercourse with his colleagues in the University ; and was a welcome guest at the table of many, who were eminent in business, or high in office, and who returned his visits with every mark of personal respect.

respect. But his most frequent and familiar associates were selected from his co-presbyters, and strangers of the same profession from the country, who could both relish and promote the discussion of topics relating to the church; and all that sort of *esoteric* conversation, in which members of the same community delight to indulge. In autumn he commonly visited his relations, and the family of Ochtertyre; or joined with a party of his friends in some cheerful excursion.

But this tranquil and enviable course of life was not to last. It was interrupted, in the early part of 1805, by prognostics of some internal disease. At first there was no alarming symptom except a frequent acceleration of the pulse; but during the summer, most of which he passed with a brother in the country, he was affected with a debility, and an indistinct sensation of decline, which made him at that time abandon all hope of recovery. By the skill of his physicians, however, and the resistance of his constitution, his strength and spirits were so far recruited, as to fit

him for the usual duties of the winter, and for enjoying a long ride in the following summer. During all this period, his unfavourable symptoms never entirely disappeared, and were often so considerably increased, that a mind of less firmness would probably have given way under constant and protracted apprehension. In the beginning of 1807, he became considerably worse; but for the last time regained sufficient strength, to accompany two friends, with apparent enjoyment, in a pretty extensive tour. On opening his class, soon after his return, he spoke so feebly, as to show that his strength was exhausted, and his respiration impeded. Having persevered for two weeks, he was obliged entirely to desist, and to call in the willing aid of Dr Baird, his colleague, who read the remainder of his lectures. In January 1808 his unfavourable symptoms rapidly multiplied, and some of them were attended with excruciating pain; but on the 25th, while conversing with his colleague, a paralytic stroke deprived him of sensation on that side where his sufferings had been most acute, and so far contributed to

“ smooth

“ smooth the bed of death.” In this helpless state, the respectful tenderness of his friends was strongly manifested, by the number who contended for the honour of watching over him. On the 27th his articulation, which had hitherto been unintelligible, became somewhat better, and the first expression which could be understood was this solemn one ; “ I am about
“ to pass to a better habitation, where all
“ who believe in Jesus shall enter.” He soon after requested to join in some acts of devotion suited to a death-bed. In the course of the day, he gave distinct directions about his affairs, and named the books which he wished to be presented to his friends, with a minute attention to their taste, and with such exact instructions where to find the absent volumes, as shewed the most perfect calmness and self possession. Warmth of friendship, for which he was always distinguished, was the last feeling that forsook him : and the agitation, occasioned by an impulse of affection, snapt the slender thread by which soul and body were still held together. On the 28th, about the hour when his friends generally
made

made their final enquiry for the day, a number of them were assembled in his library ; and one who was about to retire, signifying a desire to see him, was introduced and named. The Doctor grasped his hand, and expressed the satisfaction which he felt in such an attendance at such a moment : and being about to swallow some cordial, added, “ I drink your health, my dear Sir, “ and may your life be long !” At this, his friend being unable to suppress his emotions, precipitately withdrew ; and the patient appeared to change so suddenly, that all in the adjoining room were called in, and formed a silent circle round his bed, while he gently and almost imperceptibly expired. So insensibly indeed did the spirit disengage itself, as he leant on the bosom of a brother, that a deep unbreathing pause of several minutes ensued, while every eye was fixed on the pale countenance, with an expectation of seeing it re-animated. It was a spectacle of solemn and impressive sublimity : a picture so forcibly stamped on the minds of the beholders, by its associated circumstances, and especially by “ the aw-
“ ful

“ful stilness of sorrow,” in which it was contemplated, as never to be obscured by the longest train of subsequent events which the last survivor of the group may witness.

The anxiety felt by the public respecting the fate of Dr Finlayson, and the sensation created by his death, bore ample testimony to the general conviction of his worth ; and the numerous and honourable attendance on his funeral, proclaimed to the city, through which it proceeded, the value and consideration of him whom it had lost. Ten of his more intimate friends accompanied it to Dunblane, in the Cathedral of which he was interred on the 2d of February ; and never was a grave bedewed by the tears of a more sincere and penetrating regret.

The character of Dr Finlayson was plain and simple, and open to the most careless inspection. With a just confidence in himself, which he never affected to disguise ; he had no vanity to create those intricate concealments, and unfounded pretensions, which require superior sagacity to penetrate.

trate. His passions were naturally keen, and of any conduct that was equivocal or base, he never minced his reprehension, "for even his failings leant to virtue's side." He had few of the arts of a politician, and none of a courtier. His perfect sincerity, and unconsciousness of any hostile feeling which required to be suppressed, gave him to his political opponents an appearance of bluntness: but to his friends his manner was precisely the same. When they applied to him for advice, as they uniformly did in every difficulty, if he thought they had acted amiss, he told them so with explicitness and brevity; disdaining all those prefatory softenings, and qualifying approaches that are employed by men of address, to oil the knife before they cut; and avowing the utmost contempt of that squeamish sensibility, which requires to be "swaddled" and dandled" into a sense of duty. Such was the persuasion, however, of the excellence of his counsel, and the purity of his intentions, that notwithstanding this primitive plainness of manner, even his political rivals, on points of business unconnected with party, are said to have occasionally resorted

sorted to his judgment. In conversation he preserved the same artless sincerity; and was perhaps too strict a reasoner, to be very lively or amusing, as the companion of a relaxing hour. He was so quick to perceive any looseness of argument, or confusion of ideas, that he sometimes damped the volatile by their detection; or put to rest, by some short Socratic question, a conversation that would have straggled into that fanciful and erratic variety, which is so generally relished. But though little qualified himself to shine in light and airy dialogue, he was pleased with it in others, and often led the way for the exertion of their talents, by provoking a harmless and inoffensive railery, in his most intimate circle. In the more serious offices of friendship, his merits were singularly perfect; for his kindness as well as his advice, his purse, as well as his personal exertions, were ever at the command of those whom he esteemed. To young men of merit he was an active and persevering patron: and to such as were indigent, his aid was extensive, though silent as that of the being whom he endeavoured to imitate. This appeared from the
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number of acknowledgments for small sums, which at his death, he directed to be destroyed.

It was a rare and pleasing circumstance in his character, that it seemed to increase in excellence, the more closely and severely it was examined. It had fewest attractions to a distant eye, but on a nearer approach, many of its apparent blemishes diminished or disappeared. No man, it has been said, is a hero to his valet de chambre ; but this maxim was contradicted in the case of Dr Finlayson, who was uniformly most admired by those, with whom his intercourse was most frequent and familiar. *Quem ego, as each of them might have said, cum ex admiratione diligere coepissem, quod evenire contra solet, magis admiratus sum, postquam penitus inspexi.*

He was cautious in exhibiting himself as an author, his only publications being two occasional sermons, and a short account of Dr Blair. He likewise printed, but did not publish, the " Heads of an Argument " on a question depending before the ecclesiastical
courts

courts. The last production furnished an excellent specimen of his practical powers in the art which it was his province to teach.

Of Dr Finlayson's manner in the pulpit, at his first appearance as a preacher, some account has already been given. It never underwent any material change. But his sermons partook of that progressive improvement which his mind derived from the daily exercise of his powers, and extension of his knowledge. A few hours before his death, he consented, at the suggestion of his colleague, that a volume of his sermons should be published, and expressed a desire that they should be printed, under the superintendance of the person whom he addressed, and of two other friends whom he named, and that the profits of the sale should be applied in aid of the surplus fund for the benefit of the widows of the ministers of the Church of Scotland. The gentlemen, entrusted with this posthumous duty, have accordingly selected, from the whole of his sermons, those which their united judgment preferred; and, from the excellence of such of these discourses as they

they have favoured the narrator with an opportunity of reading, he entertains little doubt, that they will find their care rewarded by the thanks of the public.

On the conduct pursued by Dr Finlayson, as a member of ecclesiastical courts, the present writer abstains from making any detailed remarks. The questions connected with the policy and discipline of the Church of Scotland are so remote from his concerns, that he has never paid them much attention: nor could he acquit himself of presumption, were he to hazard any opinion on topics, with which he is so imperfectly acquainted.

Of his talents in debate, his biographer is equally unqualified to judge, never having enjoyed an opportunity of witnessing their exertion. From the report of others, however, confirmed by the conception which he had formed of Dr Finlayson's character, it appears that he chiefly excelled in clear statement, close and forcible reasoning, and the exclusion of idle ornament, irrelevant
remark

remark, and every thing like stratagem or delusion.

As a teacher of logic, he acquitted himself in the manner which might be expected, from his talents, industry, and integrity. His sole and exclusive object was the improvement of those who had been entrusted to his instruction. With this he suffered nothing to interfere: and when he entered his lecture-room, it was not to recommend himself, or to seize the occasion of displaying more ability than others, but for the single purpose of communicating to his auditors as much as possible of the ability which he possessed. It frequently happens that ingenious and inventive philosophers are less successful in teaching, than might be presumed from their powers. They are apt to make their pupils of too little importance, and themselves of too much; to draw undue attention to their own discoveries; and, from aspiring with habitual eagerness at opening untravelled paths, to become negligent or reluctant guides through those which are familiar to them. With Dr Finlayson this was never the case:

for whatever might have been his disposition to relieve the fatigue of teaching by indulging in refined speculations, it was corrected by a sacred sense of duty, which made him feel that in his class-room he belonged to his pupils, and which limited his concern to the labour of that elementary training, in the rudiments of science, which they had a title to expect. The number of original thinkers in philosophy is small; and very few even of these appear at such a period, and under such a preparation of circumstances, as to have an opportunity of founding a new school or overturning an old one. The rest, though perhaps not inferior in genius to some who have had a more fortunate destiny, must be content to shew it, by their ready adoption, their skilful propagation, and their ingenious correction or illustration of prior discoveries. For such a task Dr Finlayson was admirably qualified. To every subject he applied a judgment which had confidence in its own strength, and bowed to no authority however high; a sagacity, which the oversights even of a Bacon or a Locke were unable to escape; and a boldness of close enquiry

quiry and candid statement, which their venerable names were unable to overawe. But, in whatever way he was engaged, whether in patiently repeating the initiatory maxims of science, or in enriching it with original improvements, all was in subservience to his paramount object ; and he claimed from it no farther praise, than as it contributed to the more perfect and conscientious discharge of the public duty confided to his execution.

On all subjects he had a more than ordinary aversion and contempt for vague or superficial information, and never considered himself as knowing any thing, except what he knew with profoundness and precision. The certainty and extent of his own knowledge produced their natural effect, by enabling him to communicate knowledge with equal minuteness and perspicuity ; and he disdained, for a mere parade of erudition, to perplex his students, by introducing any discussion of topics which he perceived to be incapable of definite and satisfactory explanation. This was particularly observable in the
views

views which he presented of the differences of opinion among the ancient sects ; of the subtle disputes of the schoolmen ; and of the metaphysical controversies of modern times. These subjects, which to many are irksome from their nature, have frequently been rendered more so by the indistinct and fatiguing manner in which they have been detailed. But under the treatment of Dr Finlayson, they acquired unusual interest ; chiefly from the judgment with which he selected the most striking and characteristic tenets of various classes of philosophers ; the brevity and simplicity with which he stated them ; and the consequent ease with which they could be apprehended, discriminated, and remembered.

The rational and comprehensive order, in which his ideas naturally arranged themselves, is apparent from the plan of his lectures, the first of which contains the following prospectus. “ Logic was formerly defined to be the scientific art
“ which has for its object the discovery
“ and communication of truth. A course
of

“ of lectures for teaching this art seems
“ naturally to divide itself into four great
“ branches. The first should contain a
“ description of the faculties of the human
“ understanding, the instruments which the
“ art employs. The second should give a
“ general description and arrangement of
“ the objects, towards which these faculties
“ may be directed. The third should
“ teach the best methods of applying
“ them to all that variety of objects, for dis-
“ covering with success their nature and re-
“ lations. And the fourth should point out
“ the shortest and most certain way of com-
“ municating to others the results of that
“ application.”

Under these four heads, he communicated all the information connected with his subject, which he thought would be of practical advantage to his pupils ; without omitting to offer shorter sketches of the frivolous speculations to which it has given birth, and the history of which, though of little use, for improving the understanding, he judged it proper that a scholar should know.

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The Scotch Universities possess an advantage over those of some other countries, in the superior liberty which is allowed the teacher to exercise his own discretion for accomplishing the object of his appointment. He is confined, neither by rule nor custom, to any established text, or routine of instruction, or to follow the method of a predecessor, farther than it may appear unsusceptible of improvement. He can thus vary his lessons, and accommodate them to the progressive advance of the sciences; and, owing to this circumstance, it frequently happens, that the lectures of a new professor bear but little resemblance to those which had been previously delivered in the same department. In no hands could such a latitude of discretion be more safely lodged than in those of Dr Finlayson. His diligence enabled him to collect the most exact and extensive knowledge of his subject, and his judgment to separate what was useful from what was superfluous; while his coolness and candour prevented him from being so enthusiastically wedded to any favourite system, as not to appreciate fairly, and give due commendation to others.

others. He thought, for example, that, from the over-zeal of new converts to a revolution in philosophy, the modern improvements of logic had occasioned that of the antients to be too much depreciated and derided. He therefore held the balance dispassionately between them ; and laboured to restore the latter to such a measure of the honour which it had lost, as he thought its ingenuity and utility might fairly claim. He shewed that syllogistic reasoning was invented as an instrument by which sophistry might be exposed, and that its efficacy for such a purpose must be admitted even by its enemies; that, although it can seldom be employed to make new discoveries in the works of nature, it may often be useful to ascertain the value of the proof on which these discoveries are founded ; that though defective for conducting us to truth, it is admirably fitted to guard us against error, and that, in all abstract questions, it is the mode by which the mind naturally proceeds to unravel their intricacy. He shewed that many of the most persuasive compositions are but expanded or informal syllogisms, and proved his
assertion

assertion by reducing a variety of orations, both ancient and modern to the simple propositions which they involve. This is stated merely as an instance of that fairness, which, on all topics, Dr Finlayson as scrupulously maintained, and of the correct and impartial representations, with which he impressed the youthful mind, at its entrance on philosophical enquiries.

By those who had the good fortune of studying under this intelligent instructor, and who recollect the various degrees of gratification, which they derived from different parts of his course, it may be expected that the excellence of the concluding division, embracing the theoretical history of language, and the principles of universal grammar, should be distinguished by particular notice. These were subjects on which his acuteness and originality of reflection were conspicuously evinced. While he neglected to study no author of eminence by whom they had been discussed; and while he apportioned with striking sagacity the credit that was due to each; he did not hesitate to suggest opi-
nions,

nions, in which he differed from them all : and it is difficult to say whether the ingenuity with which these were conceived, the solid argument with which they were maintained, or the perspicuous and interesting simplicity with which they were illustrated was most deserving of applause.

He did not rest contented, however, with a consciousness of the clear and intelligible manner in which his doctrines were communicated, and of the consequent probability that they must have been apprehended and retained. He was impatient to convince himself, by the most satisfying proof, that his duty was not only done, but had succeeded in producing its effect. For this purpose, he, every week, dedicated a portion of time to the oral examination of his pupils ; and, by his masterly performance of this voluntary task, he rendered the exertion, to which their minds were thus invited, not less attractive than advantageous. Of this we need not better evidence than the fact, that although he left their attendance optional at the hour of examination, few ever availed themselves of the opportunity

nity to forego the pleasure which it afforded. He exercised them, likewise, frequently and periodically, in writing essays on the subjects which had been considered; and bestowed the most indefatigable pains, not so much in detecting, as in leading themselves to detect their errors; and in rendering them practical masters of the principles of composition, by accustoming them to recall and arrange their knowledge, and to express it with ease, propriety and elegance. From such exertions they derived the most essential benefit: and many of them now advancing to eminence in the learned professions, have been heard to acknowledge, that for the prompt and dexterous use of their talents, they are chiefly indebted to that parental assiduity, with which the wing of genius was pruned, and its first experimental flights encouraged and directed, under the care of Dr Finlayson. Even among the few, whom the very independence of opinion, to which they were formed by his precept and example, has led to differ from him, on points of high importance, those with whom his biographer occasionally meets, have been forward and unanimous, in

in expressing their unqualified approbation of the manner in which his academical duties were performed. Others, therefore, will hardly contradict the assertion, which must be allowed to imply a splendid though relative praise, that in an University renowned through Europe, for the number of illustrious men by whom its reputation is extended, Dr Finlayson was surpassed by none, as an enlightened, judicious, and successful teacher.

That he was so considered by its patrons appeared from the unexampled attention which they paid to his dying recommendation of a successor in the chair; for such was their deference even to his posthumous advice, that before his relics left the city, an offer of the office was made to the person whom he had named. The friend thus distinguished, while penetrated with a double gratitude to the adviser and to the adopters of the measure, was yet induced by circumstances to decline the appointment; but he can never cease to retain a proud and pleasing remembrance that, in a transaction which so nearly concerned him,

him, so high a compliment was paid to the judgment of one, by whose esteem he had been honoured, and of whose kindness even death had no power to intercept the effects.

By that friend the preceding memoir of Dr Finlayson is supplied: not without some complacency in the prospect, that he may thus preserve the memory of their mutual regard; and that he will be at least no loser in the estimation of others, by recording the continuance and cordiality of his connection with such a man as he has attempted to describe;—a man in whom the imperfections incident to human nature were either so few, or so strenuously corrected; and in whose life was exhibited so rare and animating an example of self-promoted merit, of unblemished purity of intention, and of all the elevated and independent energies of a vigorous and virtuous mind.

SERMON I*.

I CORINTHIANS, I. 21.

—*It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching,
to save them that believe.*

THE Christian revelation is the most important measure which Divine Providence has hitherto employed for restoring the happiness and perfection of the human race. By the clear light which it throws on many interesting subjects of speculation, it has enlarged, in an inconceivable degree, the limits of useful knowledge. By the views which it opens into the plan of the Divine Government, it has furnished consolation under all the evils that beset us. And by the force of its motives, of its aids, and of its hopes, it gives effectual support to the authority of conscience, and has promoted the

* Preached before the Society incorporated by Royal Charter for the benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the established Church of Scotland, in St. Andrew's Church, Edinburgh, 22d May, 1801.

the cause of virtue and order wherever its genuine principles have been received. It is thus *the power of God unto salvation*—the instrument by which he raises his children to the perfection and glory that are prepared for them in heaven.

The chief mean by which the blessings of this Revelation have been communicated to mankind, is the preaching of the word—a mean of instruction which, in the time of St Paul, was in a great measure new to the world. It had been employed, indeed, in the Jewish synagogue, at the reading of the law and the prophets! but that employment of it was very limited, both in respect of the subjects which it embraced, and of the persons to whom it was addressed: and throughout the whole extent of the heathen nations, the practice was altogether unknown. In Greece, by far the most celebrated of these nations for learning and refinement, there were magnificent temples, in which many splendid ceremonies were observed in honour of the gods, and a variety of officers consecrated to the services of devotion; but there was no institution like that of preaching, for explaining to the
people

people the principles of their religious system. These principles, resting on the authority of a dark uncertain tradition, were in themselves of doubtful credit ; they were intended to influence the imagination rather than the judgment of the worshipper ; and as, for this effect, a certain degree of obscurity is requisite, it was deemed unnecessary and inexpedient either to collect or to explain them. Hence, when the apostles of Christ went forth preaching the kingdom of God, and unfolding clearly its doctrines and its objects, their plan of conduct excited surprise. By *the Greeks* in particular it was derided as *foolishness*—as a scheme of reformation unskilfully devised, and on account of the simplicity and weakness of those who engaged in it, incapable of answering any valuable end.

But the judgment of the Greeks in this case, biassed by the prejudices of their education, was widely distant from the truth. Experience has shown, that the institution which they condemned, was admirably calculated for diffusing the light of religious knowledge through all ranks of men. It was, in a particular manner, fitted for pro-

moting both the intellectual and the moral improvement of the poor. It extended to the meanest slave the advantages which had hitherto been confined to the schools of the Philosophers, and opened to him sources both of information and of comfort, which no Philosopher had been able to disclose. For, *when the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.*

Many reasons concur to persuade us, that the human race is destined by Providence to rise, by gradual progressive steps, to higher and higher measures of knowledge and virtue. Wise men, in reviewing the history of their kind, have marked the progress of this advance in past ages; and they have traced with diligence the second causes which God has successively employed to promote it. Of these causes, *the preaching* of his word, though generally overlooked in the enumeration, has had a very powerful effect, and seems to me to have contributed more than any other single circumstance, to enlighten, to humanize, to reform and improve mankind. This is a position of much importance to the political history
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of human improvement, as well as to the cause of Christianity ; and as the illustration of it will unfold the great advantage which has resulted to the world even from one part of the duty performed by the Christian Clergy, it cannot fail to be peculiarly interesting to a Society instituted for the benefit of their Sons.

The three great requisites, for improving the human condition, are knowledge, consolation and virtue.—Knowledge, to discern what is good, and what are the means of attaining it ;—Consolation, to support us under the inevitable sorrows of our probationary state ;—and virtue, which is the health of the soul, and our preparation for the pure unfading happiness of heaven. Now, in each of these respects, the Institution of preaching is admirably calculated to produce the most extensive and beneficial effects.

I. The preaching of the gospel has contributed in a remarkable degree to improve the intellectual capacities of human nature, and to disseminate, through a wider sphere, the principles of useful knowledge. This

effect of it is visible in the history of the world, and has resulted necessarily from the very nature of the institution.

When we look abroad through the nations of the earth, where do we discover the most evident traces of mental cultivation? Where do the arts exhibit the most splendid triumphs? Where has science lifted her torch, and carried the light of true philosophy through all the departments of active life? Where do we find not a few speculative men, but the whole body of the people, liberal, sagacious, and enlightened? Not, as might have been expected, in those favoured regions where the advantages of crowded population and regular government have been longest enjoyed; but in those comparatively modern nations which have been illuminated by the rays of Christianity, where every individual is a free man, and has his reasoning powers exercised weekly in the most sublime and interesting discussions.

Even in Christian countries, we observe a remarkable difference in the general illumination of the people between those nations where the institution of preaching is observed

observed in its original frequency, and those where it has been in some measure superseded by the more seductive pageantry of an expensive and pompous worship. Owing to this abuse, the practice of preaching in the Christian assembly was, during the middle ages, almost totally laid aside; and the people sunk into ignorance and barbarism. It revived with the Reformation; excited the talents of those to whom it was addressed; and carried with it a light into all the countries where the Reformation made any considerable progress. Even the Romish church was, in some remarkable instances, forced in self defence to employ the same means of instruction; and wherever this happened, the consequence was soon perceptible in the improved intellectual habits of the people; where it did not, the people continued to this hour buried in the grossest ignorance and superstition*.

From

* The truth of this reasoning is confirmed not only by facts respecting the unequal diffusion of knowledge through the different portions of the western church, corresponding to the unequal degrees in which they admitted the regular practice of instruction from the pulpit. The history of the eastern church tends powerfully to establish the same point;

From these historical facts, it is obvious that intellectual improvement has at least been an attendant on the preaching of the gospel. And it will not be difficult to shew, that this institution was itself the direct and principal cause of that improvement.

It threw into the circulation of human thought a new stock of most interesting principles—principles well established themselves, fruitful in important consequences, and fitted to exercise all the higher faculties of the understanding. It trained a numerous order of men, and forced them, by the very nature of their employment, to cultivate

and it reflects credit on the enlightened policy of Catharine II. of Russia, that she early perceived, and adopted, the use of this institution for civilizing her extensive empire. “It is well known,” says one of the latest authors who have given accounts of that country, “that, in the service of the Greek church, pulpit discourses were extremely rare. The late Empress, who clearly perceived their utility, and knew the effect which the public delivery of lessons of a superior morality, substantiated by the example of the Divine Author of our religion, must have upon the hearts of men, gave great encouragement to sacred eloquence, with the utmost energy and the happiest effects.”—Storch’s Picture of Petersburg, page 360.

cultivate their intellectual talents, to cherish habits of regular thought, and to study the most effectual method of elucidating and confirming the doctrines which they taught. This order of men it mingled with the mass of the people, and placed them in a situation, where their example and instructions could not fail to draw forth and improve the reasoning powers of their hearers.—We, my brethren, are scarcely in a condition to estimate fairly the full effect of such an institution. Its advantages extend themselves indirectly even to those who are seldom seen in the place of worship; and the habitual enjoyment of them conceals its power from our view. But what would an ancient philosopher have expected, if, by an institution like this, he could have spread the light of reason beyond the limits of his school, and explained the great principles of religious and moral science in a form adapted both to the capacity and the taste of the meanest of the people? Would he not have anticipated an aera of high intellectual cultivation, and hailed with rapture the return of that fabled age of gold, when men, guided

merely by the light of their own minds, performed without restraint the obligations of duty, and enjoyed without interruption the pure delights of benevolence and virtue?—Behold, O Christian! an illumination, far brighter than that of any philosophic school, hath beamed on the world. *They who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light hath sprung up.* Schools of heavenly wisdom are opened through the nations of Christendom, where all ranks listen from their infancy to doctrines the most interesting and attractive; and where, in learning the things of God, they have their faculties exercised, their taste formed, and their powers of judging and reasoning, even concerning earthly matters, gradually strengthened and improved. “Nothing,” said the son of Sirach, “is so much worth “as a well instructed mind.” And this blessing even the labourer with us, who toils through the week for his daily bread, may enjoy in a very eminent degree. Through the institution of preaching, he has means of intellectual improvement far superior to those of the same rank in former
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mer times, and possesses, in fact, a more accurate and extensive knowledge of the works and ways of God, of the benevolent plans of Providence, and of the destination of man, than was enjoyed by the most enlightened sages of antiquity.

And do not think, my brethren, that, if this institution were now to be withdrawn, the light which it has diffused would continue with us. Though modern times would still possess other means of illumination, arising from the art of printing, from the almost universal diffusion of the art of reading, and from the general impulse given to the human powers—means which would operate to a certain extent, and, for a while, prevent the return of total darkness; yet, without the aid of this institution, and of *the public schools*, which emanated from it, and of which it still forms the vivifying principle, they would gradually languish and decline. They have not sufficient power in themselves, and on their own account, to attract the attention, or to excite the talents of the unthinking multitude. They are valued by them chiefly as a preparation for the blessings of religious instruction;

instruction ; and deprived of the co-operation and impulse given by it, they would be like a machine that had lost its spring ; their force would soon cease to reach the mass of the people ; the natural darkness and corruption of the human heart would soon prevail against them ; and the cloud of superstition and barbarism would, in a few ages, return thick and deep on the most enlightened nations of Europe.

These observations may be sufficient to prove that the preaching of the gospel, though appointed also for higher ends, has been employed by Providence as an instrument for cultivating the understandings of men, for bettering especially the intellectual condition of the poor, and for communicating to our race all the invaluable blessings which spring from knowledge, and the improvement of their rational nature. Even on this account, every good man, who takes an interest in the happiness of his kind, will be deeply grateful to God for this beneficent measure of his government ; and will, in support of it, respect those who have been appointed to convey to the nations the word of knowledge,
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avoid with care whatever may tend to impair their credit, rejoice in their success, and strive, by his example and influence, to render their utility as extensive and permanent as possible.

But this institution is not only valuable as an instrument of intellectual improvement to the human race, through the kind of knowledge which it circulates; it furnishes, besides,

II. A rich inexhaustible treasure of consolation to every individual who employs it with proper dispositions.

Numerous, my brethren, are the evils to which we are subjected in the course of our earthly pilgrimage. We live in the midst of a dark, and apparently disordered scene, through which neither wisdom nor virtue can conduct us unhurt. With a frail and mortal body, the source of innumerable pains, we have a soul which is the seat of conflicting passions, which is wounded most deeply through its best and tenderest affections, and which seems but ill fitted to struggle with the difficulties that oppose its progress to perfection. The events that be-

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fal us in this scene are frequently afflictive, and they often seem to happen without any regular direction. When they press against us, we have in ourselves but little power of resistance; and, borne down by their weight, we are too ready to conclude, that we are left desolate in a fatherless world; that there is no benevolent presiding power on whose protection we can rely; that God neither seeth nor regardeth; that *darkness is his secret place, and his pavilion round about him dark waters and thick clouds of the sky*. In moments like these, when our feet are almost gone, and our steps have well nigh slipt, how comfortable and cheering is the light which Revelation pours around us, and which, by the preaching of the gospel, is made familiar to our souls! In the sanctuary of God, we see the plan of Providence unveiled, and, through the ministry of the word, discover order and beauty rising from the darkness. The train of thought which is there presented to us, and rendered habitual by its frequent recurrence, has a direct and powerful tendency to calm the agitations of a troubled heart, and to re-establish our confidence in God,

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We there learn, on evidence most satisfactory in itself, communicated in a form well fitted to impress our imagination, and linked most intimately with all our principles of judgment and of action, that God is good to all; that, through Christ, he is reconcilable even to the guilty; that his government of the universe is free from defect; that the apparent disorder around us is essential to the nature of our probationary state, and productive of good; that even afflictions are frequently messengers of his love? and that all his dispensations are devised in wisdom to rescue us from guilt, and to prepare us in the end for a state of higher existence, where we shall be able to bear the unveiled manifestation of his glory, and to rejoice for ever in the brightness of his presence. These are the consoling doctrines which the christian teacher is sent to proclaim in the name of heaven; and which, through the preaching of the gospel, he conveys from the crowded assembly, aided by all the force of sympathy, to the habitation of the mourner. How admirably are they suited to the exigencies of our condition! How wisely is the mode of their communication

education adapted to the general circumstances of the people ! And what innumerable multitudes, pierced with sorrow, and sinking in the depths of distress, have been rescued, by their gently soothing influence, from doubt, and melancholy, and despair ! Why, then, should the gospel of the grace of God, and the ordinary means of transmitting its blessings by preaching through all ranks of men, be the objects of so much indifference, and even disparagement, to the pretended sages and philanthropists of the age ? Is it wise for themselves to withdraw from a fund of consolation which is so precious in its nature, and which, in the vicissitudes of human things, may soon become necessary to their souls ? Or is it benevolent to their brethren, and especially to their poorer brethren, to throw, by neglect either of itself, or of its ministers, contempt on an institution which teaches us to support the ills of our condition, and pours into our wounds a balm more precious than any thing which this earth can afford ? Surely the multitudes of enlightened men, who suffer themselves habitually to commit this offence, and who, by their actions and their
words

words, declare their wish, that the public establishments for diffusing the knowledge of religion were abolished, do not reflect on the consequences of their conduct, nor suspect that they are doing what they can to undermine the best bulwarks of our happiness, and to open on mankind a vial of more malignant plagues than flow from war, or pestilence, or any natural calamity.

But the doctrines which the preaching of the gospel preserves, and diffuses through all orders of the people, tend not only to enlighten the understandings of men, and to alleviate the ills of life—They are also,

III. Powerful means of our moral improvement.

This great truth your time will not permit me at present to illustrate with the fulness which its importance deserves: but it results so obviously from the very nature and tendency of the Institution, that a very few words will be sufficient to establish it.

The principles of moral duty, taught by Christ and his Apostles, have, in general, extorted applause even from the adversaries

of our faith. They possess a purity, perfection, and power, which touch the conscience of every good man, and which have not been possessed, in an equal degree, by any other system of moral duty which the world has seen. I speak not of the popular system of heathen nations, where impurity and injustice were sanctioned by the practice of their Gods, and the ceremonies of their worship: I speak not of the imperfections, which adhere of necessity to all codes of civil and criminal law: I speak not even of the elegant, but defective, delineations of duty transmitted to us by the boasted masters of Grecian wisdom. All these are obviously, and to the conviction of every candid mind, inferior, in many respects, to the morality of the gospel. I speak of the very best system which human reason, in its most cultivated state, is able to produce, and on which a philosophical unbeliever would be most disposed to rest his cause. This system, though carried to its utmost possible perfection, can never exceed, in purity and extent, the precepts of that divine law which regulates every movement of the heart; estimates actions only by the value of the in-

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ward disposition from which they spring ; and comprehends, in the wide embrace of its rules, all the relations in which we can be placed. And, while it can claim no superiority in these respects, it must remain for ever destitute of that clear authority ; that omnipotent support ; that attractive influence ; that reforming energy, by which the gospel animates, and aids, and dignifies the virtue of a Christian. Shewing to him, at once, and without the intervention of doubtful reasonings, the path in which he ought to walk, the obligations which bind him to follow it, the recompense prepared at its termination, both for the righteous and the wicked, together with the constant inspection of that great God who loves him, who will help him in every hour of need, and who will be his judge at the last—the gospel inspires him with more than moral vigour, and enables him to display a steadfastness in temptation, and a perseverance in well doing, of which the man of unassisted reason can scarcely form a conception.

The system of duty, therefore, which the gospel contains, is most perfect in itself, and most wisely adapted to the exigencies of hu-

man nature. It reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart ; it prescribes with a minuteness and accuracy which leaves no room for misconception, the conduct proper for all the situations in which we may be called to act ; and it enforces its precepts by motives the most awful and the most interesting, which can operate on the mind. Now, to unfold this system in detail, to apply it to the varying circumstances of the times, to explain its sanctions, and to prepare men, through the practice of it, for glory, honour, and immortality, is the chief employment of preaching. And, therefore, the pulpits of Christendom are, from their very nature, so many schools of virtue, in which the people at large are regularly trained to all the duties of private and of public life—to obey magistrates, to love their country, to be sober, pious, and benevolent, to discharge, with fidelity and on principle, whatever they owe to the station which they occupy, and to be fruitful in every good work.

“ But where,” it will be said in derision, “ where are the blessed fruits of this institution to be seen ? Are we to gather them

“them in the history of the church, from
 “vile and ever-recurring scenes of false-
 “hood, treachery, persecution? Or, shall
 “we find them in the selfishness, the du-
 “plicity, the bitter calumnious railings of
 “the Christians with whom we live?”—

On this point, my brethren, I have no desire to disguise the truth. The conduct of Christians, it is deeply to be lamented, has in too many instances been a reproach to the gospel. *The word of the kingdom falling by the way side, on stony places, or among thorns,* is checked in its growth by the unbelief, the levity, or the unhallowed passions of those who hear it: And the preacher of righteousness, mourning in sadness over the apparent inefficacy of his labours, has been often heard to complain with the Prophet, *Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

Yet, though such complaints have been often made, and though there be still too much ground to repeat them, we are not to conclude rashly, that the preaching of the word has been in vain. Its natural tendency, though opposed and crossed both by perversions of the gospel itself, and by unto-

ward circumstances from without, has prevailed to a certain extent, and produced a visible improvement on the moral condition of mankind. Without dwelling on the peace which it brings into the pious heart, and on the order which it diffuses through all the walks of private life, though obviously of great importance to the happiness of the world, we have only to look at the public state of nations, to be satisfied that *the word of the Lord hath not returned unto him void, but hath prospered in the thing whereto he sent it.*

It is difficult, indeed, to estimate the precise effect which the preaching of the gospel has produced in this respect. Its operation being internal, and silent, and gradual; and combined at the same time with other principles of improvement, is apt to be overlooked by the careless and superficial observer. But its influence, though silent and unostentatious, has, without controversy, been great and salutary. It is the chief instrument which Providence has employed for counteracting the numerous and overwhelming powers of corruption, that increasing wealth and luxury have poured out
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on modern times. Aided by the divine spirit, it begins by reforming the hearts of individuals; and the reformation of individuals gradually extends its effects, in various channels, through the wider circle of the community. Accordingly, the reforming power of this Institution on the nations who enjoy it, may be read in the improved form of their governments; in the superior equity of their laws; in the decency and humanity of their public customs; in the suppression, or, at least, in the concealment of their offensive passions; in the efficacy of their regulations for the happiness of domestic life; in the extent of their plans for diffusing through all ranks, the blessings of instruction; in the godlike magnificence of their establishments for the relief of sickness and poverty; and in the general order and security of every department of the state. These are the great public effects by which the sum of moral principle in a community can be estimated; and if, in these respects, the states of Christendom be compared with any other state that has ever appeared on the surface of this earth, the conclusion will be irresistible.

Other causes may, no doubt, have co-operated in the production of these effects; but it is impossible not to regard as the primary and chief cause that institution which is *peculiar* to the nations who have experienced them, which has the moral improvement of men for its immediate object, which exerts a constant unceasing influence on the public mind, and which brings to the support of the magistrate and of the laws a power of boundless force—a power which speaks directly to the conscience, which operates in private as effectually as in public, which places us continually under the immediate eye of our Judge, and in habitual view of all the encouragement, and hopes, and terrors of the gospel.

In this short imperfect estimate of the advantages which result from the preaching of the word, I have paid little attention either to the supernatural influence, which we have reason to believe accompanies it, or to its great purpose, the preparation of our souls for the happiness of heaven; not because I regard these as considerations of inferior moment; but because they are not directly subservient to the end

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I have in view. That end is to shew the men of this world, that the institution in question, considered merely as an instrument of meliorating the present condition of our race, produces the most extensive and valuable effects; and that those who vilify it, either by their doctrines or their conduct, whatever illumination they may boast, or whatever pretensions to humanity they may assume, are not men of true wisdom, and not friends to the general improvement of their kind.

It must also be here observed, that preaching is only one of the powerful means employed by the teachers of Christianity for promoting the reformation and comfort of their brethren. By various other services, they minister to the edification of those among whom they labour, lifting their supplications to the throne of grace, soothing them in affliction, counselling them in difficulty, reclaiming them from their wanderings, watching over the education of the young, cheering the hearts of the aged and the poor, and, in the hour of alarm, becoming to them all messengers of peace between God
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and their souls. Now, if their office be so conducive to the public good—if so much depends on the successful conduct even of a single department of the duty belonging to it, how important is the station which they occupy! And how deeply does it concern the community at large, that its functions be duly encouraged and discharged! With what zeal should they, who devote themselves to it, labour to acquire the qualifications which become it! And how strenuously should they apply them to spread light, and virtue, and joy through the circle in which they are placed! Fellow workers with God in advancing the happiness of his rational offspring, they need the strongest, the most improved, and the most active talents; and in contemplating the charge committed to them, how often are their hearts ready to sink, lest their ignorance, or error, or negligence should uphold beyond its time the kingdom of darkness around them, and be the means of retarding the destined perfection of their race!

But if this view of the importance of the ministerial office suggests to the teacher

of religion the activity and zeal which are due from him, it demonstrates, at the same time, the respect in which he ought to be held by all who feel an interest in the success of his labours. They are bound not only to co-operate with him in his beneficent efforts, by yielding to him their attention and countenance; but *to esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake*, and to make the provisions which are necessary for his temporal accommodation and comfort. Like every other man, who devotes his time and talents to the public cause, he is justly entitled to a remuneration proportioned to the value of his services; and, throughout the Christian world, his title to it has been universally recognized. In our own land, the wisdom of the State has made a moderate, indeed, but secure establishment, for the personal subsistence of those whom it entrusts with the office of public instruction. The enlightened piety of our immediate fathers had even led them to devise means for comforting the departing servant of God, with the assurance, that his widow and orphans will not be left, by his death,
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altogether destitute. But still, amid the growing national prosperity, which the light flowing from him had contributed to form, he saw his rank in the scale of society gradually sinking, and on many interesting occasions felt his inability both to do the good, and to enjoy the satisfactions for which his station seemed naturally calculated. In particular, his heart was often wrung with the agonizing thought, that, in consequence of his limited income, and the increasing expence of the times, his children must go forth into the world, without the advantages which had secured to himself respectability and independence. From this afflicting cause of disquietude, the benevolent Society, whom I have now the honour to address, have generously undertaken to relieve him. And their undertaking has been blessed by the approbation of their country, and the smile of heaven. They have been permitted to taste already, in all its deliciousness, the feast of benevolent minds; for they have seen the heart of many a venerable parent gladdened by the means of improvement furnished to his
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son ; and they behold rising around them for the public service, and consecrated to future fame, many a vigorous plant of genius, which, without their fostering aid, must have languished in the shade, blasted by neglect, unfruitful and unseen.—Sons of the church ! the friends of religion and of civil order rejoice with you in the success of an institution so useful in itself, so honourable to you, and so worthy of your descent ; the sainted spirits of your fathers, from their dwelling on high, behold it with rapture, as the fruit of those virtuous principles which they planted in your hearts ; and future generations, refreshed by the blessings which flow from it, will rise up to call you blessed. Go on and prosper in your pious undertaking. And may the Father of the fatherless, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, open the hearts of the wealthy, and pour abundantly into your hands the means of still more extensive usefulness, for Christ's sake ! Amen.

SERMON II.

JOHN, VIII, 31. 32.

—Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him: *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

THIS term, *the truth*, has various acceptations in scripture. In the text, and in some other passages it is evidently employed to denote the whole system of religious and moral principles which Jesus came to deliver to mankind. These principles are in themselves of great importance, and our Saviour here asserts, that the man who knows and embraces them shall, through their influence, be raised to the possession of genuine liberty.

The liberty, however, with which Christ has made his followers free, has sometimes been misinterpreted. It has been supposed
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to supersede the subordination of civil authority, and to exempt the faithful, from the compulsive restraints of human government and law. But no supposition can be more inconsistent either with his own practice, or with the whole tenor of his doctrines on this subject. Did he not himself abstain carefully from all interference with the established civil government of Judea? Did he not sanction its authority by submitting to it? and did not his apostles declare, in express terms, that the powers which be, are ordained of God; that they are his ministers for good; and that we must submit to them not only for wrath, but for conscience sake?

The kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom of this world. He came not as a statesman to new model the political arrangement of the nations; but as the Sent of God to enlighten, to reform, and to save the individuals who compose them. By diffusing more enlightened views of human duty, and by improving the character both of rulers and of subjects, his gospel certainly has contributed indirectly to advance the interests of civil liberty: but this was not its

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immediate object. The freedom which he came to bestow was not political, but moral—a freedom which unbinds not the body, but the mind; which is compatible with every form of human government; which no outward oppression can destroy; which may be enjoyed even by the slave in his fetters; and which has far nobler, more durable, and more extensive effects than even the best system of civil liberty with which this earth has been blessed.

I propose at present to consider the circumstances in which this freedom consists, that we may see how deeply we are indebted to the gospel by which it has been established. It has delivered us from all the kinds of intellectual and moral slavery which formerly held the human mind in bondage.

I. From the shackles of human authority in matters of religious belief and worship.

II. From the yoke of ceremony and superstition.

III. From the bondage of sin—and

IV. from the enslaving terrors of the grave.

Let us consider these particulars in their order.

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I. The gospel delivers men from the shackles of human authority in matters of religious belief and worship.

Before the appearance of Christ the religious opinions of mankind rested in general on a dark and unsatisfactory tradition. The worshipper, even in the most enlightened periods, knew no reason for the practices he was required to observe, but that they had descended from a former age, or that they were prescribed by the laws of the state. Or if, in some cases, a legend had been devised to account for their origin, that legend was evidently a poetic fiction, which contained no explanation of the practice, and which commonly super-added absurdity to the darkness which formerly involved it. His understanding was not addressed: it had no share in his religious services: without enquiry or instruction, he was bound, under pain of banishment or death, to submit implicitly to the decision of the priests, who announced with oracular voice the customs of his fathers.

Such was the situation of the heathen world through all its extent; nor did the

Jewish worshipper enjoy a much greater degree of liberty. In the days of our Saviour he was subjected to the authority of the scribes and pharisees, who *taught for doctrines the commandments of men*; and even in the words of his original law, it was, said *If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment, thou shalt come unto the Priests and Levites, and enquire: and thou shalt do according to the sentence which they shall teach thee; thou shalt not decline from it to the right hand or to the left; for the man that will do presumptuously, and will not bearken unto the Priest, or the Judge, even that man shall die.*

This subjection to the opinions of others in matters of religion was a most cumbersome and degrading yoke. It enslaved the noblest part of man, his understanding, and it prepared the way for every other bondage; for it introduced into the breast of every citizen a foreign power, which had at its command the sources of happiness and misery, and which, by consequence, was able to bend his conduct at its pleasure, You have only to look at the history of
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the ancient world, to see innumerable proofs that as long as the superstition of the times preserved its power, the supposed interpreter of the gods had at his disposal the peace of families, the fate of empires, and the movements of the people.

From this intolerable bondage the gospel has made us free. The truth has taught us that the great Father of the universe is no respecter of persons; that there is no particular tribe of men through whose mediation he dispenses his favours to the rest; that through the blood of Christ, access to the holiest of all is opened to every devout worshipper; and that all who fear God and work righteousness shall be accepted of him. His will, so far as he chuses to intimate it to men, has been revealed to all, not in accidental occurrences, nor in ambiguous signs, which require the art of an initiated interpreter, but in written records, and in plain language, which he that runneth may read. Though Christ hath appointed in his church an order of men, who give themselves wholly to study and declare the things of God; yet he has entrusted to them no

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authority over the consciences of their brethren. They are empowered only to stir up your minds, by way of remembrance, and to call upon you to *search the scriptures daily, whether these things be so.* The same voice which speaks to them, in the works and in the word of God, speaks to you; and you have, if you chuse, the same means of understanding it. He from whom all their authority flows, has in express terms, forbidden them to be called masters, because one is the master of the faithful, even Christ. And in compliance with this injunction, his Apostles every where address their hearers as reasonable men, who were entitled and bound to examine, and decide for themselves. *Let every man, say they, be fully persuaded in his own mind. What is not of faith, or of a rational conviction, is sin. I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say. Try the spirits whether they be of God, prove all things, hold fast that which is good, and be ready always to give an answer, to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*

This unlimited right of judgment, with which Christ has made his followers free,
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like every other valuable talent, may no doubt be abused. It may be perverted by men of wayward dispositions, to the deception of their own souls, and employed by the fanatic, to unsettle and corrupt the principles of the wavering and unsteady. It may be made the occasion of endless debates, and of oppositions of science, falsely so called, which are injurious to the truth, and minister questions, rather than godly edifying. These are certainly evils: accidentally, and through the influence of human passions, they have accompanied the gospel in its progress: and the consideration of them, will be to every good Christian a warning to be modest in his enquiries, swift to hear, slow to speak, and careful not to use his liberty as an occasion to the flesh. But he will not, on that account, undervalue or resign the noble privilege, which christianity has given him. While he endeavours to keep the unity of faith in the bond of peace; while he respects the opinions and advice of those, who are appointed to rule over him in the Lord; - while he feels, and deeply bewails his own weakness and insufficiency; yet

he will think it his duty to enquire and judge for himself. He knows that he has received his understanding from God; that to God he is accountable for the use of it; that in the day of decision, every man must answer for himself, according to the opportunities of improvement he has enjoyed; that unavoidable errors will not be imputed to him; and that if *there be a willing mind, it will be accepted according to what a man hath; and not according to what he hath not.*

II. The gospel has delivered us from the yoke of ceremony and superstition.

This was a yoke which, before the appearance of Christ, lay very heavy on all the inhabitants of the earth, and especially on the best and most conscientious men. Look back in thought, my brethren, to the religious bondage of those times, and rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. See even the pious Israelite, the worshipper of the true God, groaning under the burden of an endless multitude of prescriptions, and trembling lest a moment's inadvertence should betray him
unwillingly

unwillingly, into a dangerous transgression of them. Through how many minute burdensome observances must he pass, and from how many harmless actions must he abstain, before the smoke of his offerings, can rise acceptably to heaven! How easily may he taste, or touch, or handle what will defile him and exclude him with shame from the congregation of his brethren! Nay how often is his heart wrung with the fear lest some secret, unobserved offence may cleave to him, and draw down the wrath of that Holy God, whose sanctuary he dares not tread, who cannot be appeased without valuable gifts, and who is to be approached only through the jealous intervention of his ministers! In this service, how little was there to enlighten the understanding, or ennoble the affections! How little to cheer or elevate the heart! And how justly is it described by the Apostle, as a yoke, which neither the disciples, nor their fathers were able to bear!

Was the condition of the heathen world better or more desirable in this respect? Far otherwise. Even on the most enlighten-

ed nations the cloud of superstition hung dark, and awful, and portentous. Their religion sprung from fear, and carried through all its streams the bitterness of its fountain. Among their numerous divinities there was not one whose peculiar attributes were benevolence and mercy. They were all capricious, selfish, and revengeful: and the fears of their worshipper appeared in the cruel rites which he employed to appease them, and in the numberless occurrences which revealed to him the intimations of their displeasure. A dream, an omen, any unusual event excited his alarms: the general darkness which encompassed him, converted his alarms into settled terror: and his inability to determine which deity he had offended, in what his offence consisted, and by what means it was to be atoned, often raised his terror to distraction and despair.

To deliver themselves from this slavish dread, even good men were sometimes tempted to cast away from them all thought of religion, and all reverence for God and his worship. With this view Epicurus, in the most enlightened days of Greece, devised
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for them a system of philosophical atheism. But did this system improve their condition? Alas, my brethren, what security could they expect from the vain and monstrous attempt to stifle the best and most ennobling affections of their nature! They soon found that, with the fears of religion, they had cast away its comforts, and exchanged terror for misery unmixed and hopeless; that the stillness of scepticism, like the stillness of the grave, is at all times more alarming to the mind than even the spectres of superstition; and that when sickness or misfortune irresistibly awaken the sleeping sentiment of devotion, the fears of God return upon them in wrath, and arm the furies of guilt with tenfold vengeance.

To the soul pressed down and galled with this intolerable yoke, how sweet is the liberty with which the Truth has made us free! It hath destroyed the hand writing of ordinances that was against us. It represents God to us as our reconciled father in Christ, who has no pleasure in the misery of his creatures, who is to be found of them that seek him with sincerity, who bears to us the heart of a friend, and who will not withhold

hold from us any good. It has divested his worship of every thing burdensome or degrading, and left it a pure and rational service, in which angels might join with improvement and delight. It has taught us to behold the universe as the temple in which he dwells; to regard all its elements as his ministers subject to his controul; to dread none of their appearances as indications of vengeance; to recognise in the earthquake and the storm the commissioned instruments of his bounty for the prevention of still greater evils; to adore his kindness even in the visitations of affliction; and to see in every event his beneficent arm working for the good of them who love him. We have thus received from the gospel not the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba! Father! The privilege is invaluable, and it is our duty to evince our gratitude by our unwearied care to preserve and to improve it. There have been and still are Christians, who, misled by the fears of guilt, have shown a desire to return by various ways to the weak and beggarly elements from which they had escaped. Not

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to mention the corruptions of darker times, how many are there among ourselves who have converted religion into an anxious service ; whose hearts are oppressed with an endless train of superstitious terrors ; who value the form more than the power of godliness, and who are again entangled with the yoke of bondage ! Let us, my brethren, shew a worthier spirit. Let us maintain our dignity as the sons of God, and worshipping him in spirit and in truth, let us serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.

SERMON III.

The same Subject continued.

JOHN, VIII, 31. 32.

—Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him: *If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

I FORMERLY observed that by the Truth is here meant the system of moral and religious principles taught in the gospel; and that the freedom which it gives, corresponding with the nature of Christ's spiritual kingdom, is not political, but moral. This freedom is of the most important and valuable kind—far more important to the happiness of man, and far more valuable in itself, than the best system of political liberty which the most enlightened and benevolent statesman has ever devised; it reaches to the heart itself; it delivers us from the shackles of human authority in matters of religious

religious worship and belief, from the cruel yoke of superstition, from the bondage of sin, and from the terrors of death and the world to come.

I have already considered the influence of the Gospel in freeing us from impositions on our faith, and from the dominion of superstitious terrors ; and now I proceed to observe,

III. That the truth makes us free from the slavery of sin.

The highest conceivable degree of liberty consists in the power of doing without restraint whatever our unbiassed judgment pronounces to be right. Every impediment to the exercise of it is a limitation of liberty, and every force which overpowers it is a direct cause of servitude : for, in the language of the apostle, *by whomsoever a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

In our present state there are various obstacles which restrain us in the free pursuit of what our judgment pronounces to be right. Some of them proceed from without, but by far the most powerful and constant

stant of them proceed from principles within our own breast—from those headstrong, unruly passions which darken our understanding, seduce our reason, and hurry us into the commission of acknowledged sin.

The passions were intended by God to be the servants of reason,—ready at her direction to stimulate us in the pursuit of good. In this subordinate employment, they form a very important and useful branch of the human constitution: but when they are permitted to become directing principles, to dispute the authority of reason, and to bend her at their pleasure, they have usurped a throne to which they have no title; they have become the tyrants of the soul, and the tyranny which they exercise is of the most oppressive kind. Even one of them is a hard master; but they seldom dwell single; and when a whole legion of them have taken possession of the heart, they hold it in the most cruel bondage. They rule without mercy,—they are insatiable in their demands,—they are at variance among themselves, and issue contradictory mandates which it is impossible to execute; even after the longest life of
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service, and after strength has failed, they hold their unhappy drudge to his toilsome task ;—and the rewards which they bestow on him are shame, and sorrow, and remorse. He feels that he is a slave—a miserable degraded slave, who has fallen, through his own fault, from the dignity of man ; who is driven, like the beasts that perish, by the impulse of his passions ; who has no title to the esteem of his brethren, and no confidence towards God.

Yet it sometimes happens that men submit to this degrading servitude with apparent tranquillity, and without any effort to shake it off. Having been the servants of sin from their youth up, they know no better state : they seem to love the service of their passions : they even glory in their shame, and caress the instruments of their bondage. But are they on that account free ? by no means. Would you call the prisoner free, because he sleeps in his dungeon, and as he sleeps dreams of the joys of freedom ? or the madman in his cell, who shakes his chains in smiles, and kisses it as the ensign of his dignity ? no more are those sinners free, who bear without repining

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ing the yoke of their passions. Their insensibility proves only the woful depth of their debasement, and excites the melancholy fear that their case is hopeless, and that they will never recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, being thus taken captive by him at his will.

But in general, sinners feel the weight of their fetters, and desire to be delivered. The sense of their misery excites at times a wish, or even a half-formed purpose, to resist the dominion of their oppressors. But their wish is ineffectual—their purpose vanishes at their appearance of the tyrants who hold them in subjection; and the struggle which they make serves only to fasten the yoke of bondage closer on their necks. Every defeat weakens their confidence in their own strength; while the habit of conquering emboldens their oppressors to multiply their claims, prepares the vanquished for new defeats, and rivets on them the chain of slavery. Though they groan beneath their burden—though they often blush at the inconsistency between their principles and their conduct—and though sometimes, in the bitterness of their hearts, they
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curse the folly which has laid them thus low at the feet of their enemies ; yet, conscious of their own inability to become free, they cease at last to form the purpose of resistance. At the recollection of what they might have been, they shed, at intervals, a few unavailing tears over their helplessness, and submit again to be driven at the mercy of their task-masters. Hear how justly, and how pathetically the apostle, personating a sinner of this description, bewails their miserable state. *I am carnal, sold under sin ; for that which I do, I allow not ; what I would that I do not ; but what I hate that I do. I find a law that when I would do good, evil is present with me ; for I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?*

From this vile and most degrading slavery, this death of the soul, no system of philosophy nor of religion, hitherto known, had been able to give deliverance. The powers of reason, broken by the fall, were

unequal to the task ; and the law contained in ordinances, was weak through the flesh. But behold, O Christian, to thee, the day of Redemption hath come. *The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made thee free from the law of sin and death.* How soft and reviving to the soul, torn and baffled in the contest with its passions, is the voice with which he calls us to virtue and freedom ! *Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* To destroy the dominion of sin was the great purpose for which your Redeemer came into the world ; and all power in heaven and on earth is given him to accomplish it. If you submit to his guidance, you shall receive the means of freedom. His doctrines dissolve the false associations, which supported the powers of passion : his promises rouse and re-animate the better principles within us : his example guides us in the way to victory : and his spirit—the spirit of truth, strengthens us with might, and enables us

to overcome. The conquest indeed which he enables us to make, is not the work of a moment: it is the business of our lives. The tyrants that lodge within us will make many a powerful effort to preserve their ascendancy. But if we cordially embrace the principles of the gospel, we shall soon find that the chain which held us fast, is broken; that every day we acquire more and more the self command, which belongs to free men; that sin reigns no longer in our mortal bodies; and that we may aspire with confidence after perfection, knowing that *where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty; and that he who hath begun the good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

IV. The truth makes us free from the slavish fear of Death, and the Judgment to come.

Death is emphatically stiled in scripture the king of terrors. The pangs and convulsions which accompany it alarm the animal part of our frame: the darkness, with which nature has invested it, startles and perplexes the understanding: the

mournful separations which it occasions distract the heart: and conscience trembles at the terrific spectres which the imagination has placed beyond it. Hence the prospect of it has always been felt by the unenlightened mind as a cause of depression which checks the exertion of our noblest powers, and renders our best affections the sources of our bitterest anguish. Both Jews and Gentiles shuddered at the thought of its approach; and through fear of it were all their life-time subject unto bondage.

It is true indeed that nature in all ages longed to be delivered from this anxious state of terror, and fondly cherished the hope that the desolations of death would not last for ever. It had fancied to itself some shadowy form, which should outlive the stroke of dissolution, and, in a land of shadows, retain the remembrance, and the feeling of its former state. All the powers of imagination and of reason were exerted to give some colour of plausibility to this pleasing hope, and to fortify the heart against the terrors of the grave. But how feeble, alas! was the support
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that could be derived from speculations like these! They might amuse the fancy, in the stillness of scholastic retirement, and while the heart was at ease. But they were unfit for use in seasons of trial and distress. They vanished before the messengers of death: or, if they remained, they shed on the grave only a dim disastrous light, which served but to magnify the objects of fear, and to increase the horrors of the scene. How awful to the soul; how discouraging to every generous emotion is the terrible uncertainty, that the friendships, which are now the pride and joy of my heart, may soon close for ever! that the virtuous improvements which cost me so many toils and efforts may be buried with my body in the grave! and that I myself in a few years, perhaps in a few days, must either cease to be, or go I know not whither, a prey to dumb forgetfulness, or the victim of some inexorable demon destined to execute everlasting vengeance on my crimes! Could the man who lived in this uncertainty be master of himself amid so many causes of alarm? Could he act from the impulse of an unbi-

assed judgment, and with the dignified ease of a free man? No, my brethren, he was the perpetual slave of fancy, at the command of every impostor who chose to take advantage of his terrors, and ready to adopt every superstitious folly that promised him protection or relief.

From this bondage also, Christ has made his followers free. By making an atonement for their sins, he has disarmed death of his sting, and by rising as the first fruits of them that sleep, he has secured to us the victory over the grave. Discovering the reality of a future world, and revealing its connection with the present, he hath elevated our aims above this region of mortality, and given a new aspect and importance to the events which befall us on earth. Its joys lose their power to dazzle and seduce, when viewed through the glory that remains to be revealed. Its employments cease to be a burden, because we see them leading to an endless recompence of reward. And even its sorrows can no longer overwhelm us, because when compared with the whole of our duration, they last but for a moment, and are means appointed

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ed by our Father to prepare us for our future inheritance. How cheering are these considerations under the severest trials to which we are exposed ! From how many perplexing, anxious, enslaving terrors have they set us free ! What is it, O Child of sorrow, what is it that now wrings thy heart, and bends thee in sadness to the ground ? Whatever it be, if thou knowest the truth, the truth shall give thee relief. Have the terrors of guilt taken hold of thee ? Dost thou go all the day long mourning for thy iniquities, refusing to be comforted ? And on thy bed at night do visions of remorse disturb thy rest, and haunt thee with the fears of a judgment to come ? Behold the Redeemer hath borne thy sins in his own body on the tree ; and, if thou art willing to forsake them, thou knowest with certainty that they shall not be remembered in the Judgment against thee. Hast thou, with weeping eyes, committed to the grave the child of thy affections, the virtuous friend of thy youth, or the tender partner whose pious attachment lightened to thee the load of life ? Behold they are not dead. Thou

knowest that they live in a better region with their Saviour and their God ; that still thou holdest thy place in their remembrance ; and that thou shalt soon meet them again to part no more. Dost thou look forward with trembling to the days of darkness that are to fall on thyself, when thou shalt lie on the bed of sickness, when thy pulse shall have become low—when the cold damps have gathered on thy brow—and the mournful looks of thy attendants have told thee that the hour of thy departure has come ? To the mere natural man this scene is awful and alarming. But if thou art a Christian—if thou knowest and obeyest the truth, thou needest fear no evil. The shadows which hung over the valley of death shall retire at thy approach ; and thou shalt see beyond it the spirits of the just, and an innumerable company of angels, the future companions of thy bliss, bending from their thrones to cheer thy departing soul, and to welcome thee into everlasting habitations. Why then, my christian brother, why should slavish terrors of the future disquiet thy soul in the days of this vain life which
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passeth away like a shadow? The gospel hath not given thee the spirit of fear, but of confidence and joy. Even now there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit: and when they die, (a voice from heaven hath proclaimed it) *Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*

Such, my brethren, are some of the chief points of that invaluable liberty which Christ came to confer on mankind, and which every good man, whatever be his outward condition, may now actually enjoy. In this imperfect world, indeed, the freedom of the Christian is still incomplete; because he receives and comprehends the truth imperfectly. But the system of principles which the gospel contains is fitted to accomplish its object. It is the word which hath gone out of the mouth of the Lord, *which shall not return unto him void, but shall prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it.* Even here, in proportion to the degree in which its principles are admitted, they

they make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work: and in the world to come, where every thing which is in part shall be done away, and where he shall know, even as he is known, they will make him free as an angel of God.

But alas! Christians, though this be the natural effect of the gospel when its principles are admitted with full conviction into good and honest hearts, what reason have we still to bewail its apparent inefficacy! When we cast our eyes abroad through the christian world, and mark the spirit which prevails in it, how little do we find betokening a kingdom of universal liberty! we see every where around us traces of the lowest servitude and constraint. Here are slaves of vanity and fashion, bending before the public shrine, and toiling hard by every frivolous artifice to catch the capricious gaze of worthless admiration. Yonder are slaves of ambition, tottering on the narrow summit of power, trembling at the precipices around them, and grasping at the most dishonourable means to save them from the pits that are dug for their fall. On every hand are drudges of vice, driven
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by their lusts, lashed by avarice, goaded by envy, spurred by resentment, and tossed on the irregular tempestuous wave of sensual appetite, wasting their time on that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. Nay, even in the family of Jesus, and among the most zealous professors of attachment to his cause, we see too often the momentary tremblings of conviction—the slavish observance of particular days and places and teachers—the ungovernable raptures of enthusiasm—the uncharitable boastings of spiritual pride—or the peevish complaining of intolerance, prevailing against the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and consuming the very bones and substance of religion.—These things, my brethren, ought not so to be. They are remains of the natural slavery of man; they rest on imperfect views of the Christian scheme; and they are hostile to the best interests of the gospel. Let us cultivate principles more suitable to its genuine spirit, and shew that we know the truth by a corresponding conduct. While our glad hosannahs rise to him who came in the name of the Lord to save, us let us
worship

worship in spirit and in truth ; and, in all the relations of life, let us act as the Ransomed of the Lord. Freed from the fears of man, from the bondage of passion, and from the terrors of the grave, let us maintain the dignity of our rational nature, and hold on our righteous course without turning to the right or to the left. We shall thus be armed against all the possible events of this uncertain life. Whether our outward circumstances be prosperous or adverse, protected by impartial laws, or dependent on the caprice of a master, we shall have liberty within : we shall feel in our experience that the service of God is true freedom : and we shall approach by gradual steps to that happy state where there shall remain nothing to annoy us ; into which fear shall never enter ; and where our freedom shall be perfect and everlasting. Amen.

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SERMON IV.

MATTHEW, XXVIII, 17.

—*And when they saw him, they worshipped him,
but some doubted.*

OUR Saviour had on different occasions intimated to the disciples, that, after his resurrection, he would meet them in Galilee. As he retired from the celebration of the first supper he said unto them, *All ye shall be offended because of me this night ; for it is written I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered ; but after that I am risen I will go before you into Galilee.* In like manner, the angel who rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulchre, in announcing the resurrection to the women who had come with spices to embalm the body of their master, commanded them to

go quickly and tell his disciples He is risen from the dead, and behold he goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see him. And soon after, as they were returning homeward, Jesus himself appeared to them in person and said, Be not afraid, go and tell my brethren that they go into Galilee : there shall they see me.

There were several reasons why Jesus should chuse Galilee as the place of shewing himself publickly to his disciples. In that district he had spent his youth, and performed the greater part of his mighty works ; and therefore in it he was best known, and could find the most competent witnesses for establishing the identity of his person, and the reality of his resurrection. To the eleven apostles, indeed, repeated opportunities had been given of satisfying themselves on this point before they left Jerusalem. But satisfaction was to be given to the other disciples also, and therefore in obedience to their master's injunction, the eleven repaired to Galilee, that in the company of their brethren, his kinsmen and neighbours, they might witness the fulfilment of his promise. With this
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view they went up to the mountain which he had appointed ; and, as is generally supposed, they conducted with them above five hundred disciples, by whom he was seen at once.

The impression made by the appearance of Christ on this occasion was different on the minds of different persons : and in recording it the evangelist discovers the same candour which occurs in other parts of his narrative. He makes no attempt to exaggerate the conviction which it produced. He tells us fairly that when they first saw him approaching, the eleven who, by previous circumstances, were prepared to recognize him, fell prostrate in obeisance to him ; but that some, that is, some of the rest who were with them, *doubted*, influenced probably both by the uncommonness of the event, and by the current belief of the Jews concerning spectral apparitions from the dead. They needed time for reflection, and opportunity of more accurate observation for the purpose of establishing their belief. And in the present case these advantages were instantly furnished ; for Jesus came forward and spake unto them ;

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explained to them his authority, renewed to the apostles their commission to convert the nations, and promised the aid of his presence to be with them always, even to the end of the world.

It hath often happened in succeeding times, as well as at the beginning, that doubts have darkened the conviction of those who have given but a slight attention to the evidence of the gospel. Such doubts, however, have the most prejudicial effect on both the comfort and the practical influence of the truth. It may therefore be useful to embrace this opportunity of examining the grounds on which they rest, and of endeavouring to remove them.

The doubts which, previously to a full examination, have perplexed the minds even of candid enquirers arise from very different sources. Without descending to the minute and captious criticisms which are the offspring of mere petulance and presumption, we may find, on a passing view of the subject, four general grounds of prejudice against the reception of the gospel.

I. The

I. The poverty and meanness of the external condition in which Jesus appeared on earth.

II. The unexpected and mysterious nature of the doctrines which his system contains.

III. The imperfection of the evidence by which it is supported. And,

IV. Its want of success in accomplishing the end for which it was given.—Let us briefly examine these grounds of doubt in their order.

I. The poverty and meanness of the personal condition of Christ and his apostles, have been often regarded as incompatible with their pretensions to the honour of a divine commission. The human imagination readily associates the ideas of divinity and of external grandeur, and is disappointed when they do not appear in conjunction.

This prejudice operated with peculiar force against the gospel at its first publication. At that time the cross of Christ was to both Jews and Gentiles a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. In their imagination dignity of office was so inseparably

rably connected with the trappings of external rank, that they could not bring themselves to believe that God would employ an unlettered mechanic as the messenger of his mercy. *Is not this, say they, the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren James and Joses and Simon and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? and they were offended in him.*

This prejudice was still farther increased by the meanness of the persons whom he chose for assistants in the ministry of reconciliation. Those humble men carried with them to the nations no recommendation from birth, from education, or external appearance; no attractions of speech to captivate the learned, no pliancy of address to conciliate the powerful, no princely pomp to dazzle and seduce the people. Their condition corresponded in every respect with the servile condition of their master, and presented to the eye of worldly men nothing which seemed befitting the ambassadors of that mighty Being whose throne is in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all.

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By these circumstances were the minds of men prejudiced against the gospel in the beginning ; and their influence, though perhaps less powerful now, is still felt. Though the infidel now will scarcely venture to avow them seriously as reasons for his infidelity ; yet by insinuations and sarcasms he gives sufficient proof that they still pervert his imagination and mislead his judgment. He can still talk of the splendor that becomes an earthly ambassador, and ask why it behoved the Son of God to carry his message to mankind in the form of a beggar, and to die, in declaring it, the death of a slave ?

This prejudice, though it has had extensive influence, is entirely the offspring of imagination. The moment that we apply to it the tests of reason, it vanishes, like the spectre of night, before the light of the morning. It originates in the supposition that external equipage is the sign of true dignity ; and that God must support his government by the same illusions which men have found useful for supporting the subordinations of civil society—a supposition too obviously false to require a

laboured refutation. Would it have been fit that the divine messenger who came to wean our affections from this world, and to raise us above it, should be himself entangled in its vanities? Or would his superiority to the princes of this earth have appeared more conspicuously through the magnificence of his dress and the number of his attendants, than through his power with a word to heal all manner of diseases, to raise the dead, and to still the raging of the winds and waves? No, my brethren, the transient distinctions of earthly greatness are themselves only of temporary advantage; they are only consequences of the imperfection of human things, and secondary means of restraining the disorders of human society. In the direct operations of God they can have no place. He wills, and it is done. Even in the most wonderful of his works, *he holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud over it.* His majesty appears in the simplicity of his instruments, and the superiority of his power displays itself most visibly when *he chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the*
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the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.

In this view, therefore, we have no reason to regard the poverty of Jesus as inconsistent with the character of a heavenly messenger. Nay, when we examine the subject more closely, we find that the station assigned to him was of all others best suited for answering the benevolent purposes of his mission. It qualified him to speak consistently and with due effect concerning the inferior value of worldly goods: It gave him an opportunity of conversing freely with the great body of the people, and of communicating to them his instructions, unfettered by the restraints of dignity: It enabled him to give an example accommodated, not to a few elevated potentates, but to mankind at large: It placed him in a condition to know from experience, and consequently disposed him to commiserate the sorrows and trials of the most numerous class of his followers. And it prepared him to become the sacrifice for sin, and to undergo those sufferings by which *he was destined to finish transgression and bring in everlasting righteousness.*

It deserves to be remarked still farther, on this head, that the circumstances of Christ and his Apostles afford to us indirect indeed, but convincing indications that the religion which they taught descended from heaven. Men of learning might perhaps have devised a liberal enlightened system of religion, and men of rank and power might have given to it a degree of currency among the nations. But what was to be expected from the carpenter of Nazareth, and the fishermen who followed him? Were we to expect from them, nursed, as they were, amidst the lowest bigotry of Jewish prejudice, an extensive system of religious and moral truth, superior in point of purity, of liberality, and of accommodation to human wants, to all that the wisdom of ages, and the efforts of cultivated genius had been able to produce? Were we to expect that under their feeble patronage even a good system, issuing from an obscure, despised corner of Judea, should in a few years overturn the established superstition of the times, extort from the learned of Asia and of Europe a confession of their former ignorance, and, contrary to their

their supposed interest, convert to the acknowledgement of the truth, the most enlightened and corrupted quarters of the world? No, christians, this is not the usual course of human things. *It was the doing of the Lord, and it is wondrous in our eyes.* It was the inspiration of the Almighty which gave them this knowledge. It was his arm which levelled before them the strength of opposition. And the treasure which they carried was his treasure *committed to earthen vessels*—to mean and contemptible men—for this express purpose that *the excellence of its power might be seen to be of God.*

II. Doubts concerning the truth of the gospel sometimes proceed from the unexpected and mysterious nature of the doctrines which it contains. This prejudice has two aspects. It may respect either the kind of subjects that have been revealed; or the obscurity that still cleaves to them. In meditating on a revelation from God, speculative men too often venture to anticipate the subjects to which it should refer, and the kind of light which it should convey,

vey, and to reject every claim which does not correspond in these respects to the standard they have formed. Though it be obvious that we, who know not the designs of each other, can have no means of foreseeing the plans of that infinite being whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, and whose *pavilion round about him are dark waters and thick clouds of the sky* ; though we feel that even with respect to natural operations, we can discover only a few steps of his procedure by the light of experience ; and though the very end which a revelation may be intended to accomplish, lies far beyond the reach of human conjecture ; yet how often has the infidel, trusting merely to the light of his own preconceptions, sat in judgment on the gospel of Jesus, and condemned it, because he does not find in it the discoveries which he expected it to contain. Hence the objections against it on this ground have been as numerous and contradictory as the pursuits and the wants of those who make them. The Greeks of old sought after wisdom ; and they turned away from the gospel with contempt, because it addressed itself to the unlearned, and

and gave no solution of the capcious metaphysical questions which had so long perplexed the schools of their philosophers. The critic expected to find in it those faultless models of eloquence which he had searched for in vain in the writings of men, and was dissatisfied because it came not in the excellency of speech, and delivered the oracles of God in the artless, but majestic simplicity of plain, unaffected composition. The naturalist still suspects and undervalues it, because it gives him no new information concerning the motions of the heavens and the material structure of this globe. And the man of worldly wisdom, observing in it no schemes of temporal policy, no methods of increasing wealth, no constitutions for the prosperity of nations—nothing, in short, but certain questions about what he is pleased to call superstition and a world to come, like Gallio of old, cares for none of these things, and boldly pronounces that they cannot have deserved the interference of heaven.

Prejudices of this class have had an extensive influence, especially among the half learned, in opposing the cordial reception
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of the gospel. And yet nothing can be more unreasonable than the expectations on which they rest. They spring from casual and limited habits of thought, and would degrade the revelation from God into an instrument of promoting partial ends that are either of little value, or that may be safely left to the ordinary exertion of the human faculties. How much nobler ! how much more useful ! how much more worthy of God are the purposes which we find declared in scripture as the ends of divine revelation ! We there learn that God has condescended to instruct his creatures, not in points which excite the curiosity of a few speculative individuals, nor concerning arts which the natural faculties he had conferred upon them are capable of perfecting : but concerning matters of great, ineffable importance to them all, and of which they could have otherwise had no information—concerning the means of retrieving the general disaster of the fall, of delivering the race of rational beings from everlasting destruction, and of restoring them to the image and the enjoyment of their Father. This revelation, into which even angels desire

sire to look, may have still other and far higher ends in view. It may perhaps extend its influence to other worlds, and serve purposes of beneficence that are to us still inconceivable. But from what we already see, what reason is there to rejoice in its light, and to prize it above the accumulated treasures of science and of art! It hath opened our prospect into the invisible world; unveiled to us the perfections, and government, and laws of the Eternal; explained the relations in which we stand to him; inculcated a pure system of religious worship and duty, which is limited by no bounds of time or space; which is adapted equally to the circumstances of all mankind, and which is able to make us partakers of the inheritance of the saints in heaven. It is practical in its tendency; and contains not barren speculations for the amusement of literary minds; but principles fertile of good conduct, powerful to controul the passions of the heart, and stored with consolation against the sorrows of mortality. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God in Christ Jesus! it surely becomes us to *count all things but loss for*
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the excellency of this knowledge, that through it we may be found in him, not having our own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God by faith.

But granting, it has been often said, the inestimable value of the objects which Christianity pretends to disclose, how come the views which it gives of them to be so obscure? Even the apostles of Christ acknowledge that *they speak the wisdom of God in a mystery*; and it is obvious to every reader that in their writings there *are many things hard to be understood*. How is this inconsistency to be explained? can we believe that God would speak unintelligibly to his creatures, and defeat the very end of his revelation by veiling it in darkness?

This objection has been often urged triumphantly by the enemies of revelation: I am afraid, it has sometimes received too much countenance from the unguarded language of well meaning Christians; and therefore it may be proper to examine it with attention, especially as it seems to have originated in a misapprehension of the import of scripture.

In that part of the new Testament which is addressed to the Greeks, frequent allusion is made to the mysteries, the most solemn religious institution of their country. In these mysteries, to which none were admitted without previous purification, certain divine truths were inculcated by the priests for the purpose of teaching the worshipper, 'how to live with comfort, and to die in hope.' These truths, before unknown to him, were revealed at his initiation into the mysteries, and made palpable to his senses by the splendid representations which accompanied them. Now in this respect, say the apostles, the preaching of the gospel corresponds to the Grecian mysteries. Truths before unknown, or veiled under the types of Jewish law—even the wisdom of God that had been hidden from the foundation of the world, are now made manifest to all nations for the obedience of faith. To us it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom, and we open our mouths boldly to declare them. It is a mistake, therefore, to suppose that the apostles represent the doctrines of Christ as still mysterious and incomprehensible. Their uniform
language

language is, the mystery is revealed, and all men are commanded to come to the knowledge of the truth and to be saved.

It is true that innumerable questions may be put respecting the facts contained in the gospel, and to which no wise Christian will venture to give an answer ; because the answer has not been revealed. His situation in this respect, however, is not peculiar. It is precisely similar to that of every man with regard to all the other knowledge he possesses. The sources from which we derive our information in these two cases are indeed different. In the one we trust revelation for ultimate facts ; and in the other we trust our senses and our feelings. But in both cases, the range of our knowledge concerning these facts is precisely of the same extent, and bounded by similar limits. In both we may know clearly the facts themselves, and the relations they bear to each other, so far as is necessary for our comfort and the direction of our conduct. But whenever we attempt to advance a step farther, either in the world of revelation or in the world of sense, and to determine the nature, the manner, and the cause of what

is represented to us, we find our progress bounded by a line of impenetrable obscurity. You know that you are, and that you have a body and a soul. But can you explain the nature of these substances, or of the union that constitutes them one person, or of the means by which they mutually affect each other? You see other men around you, and you feel that by their words they can influence the resolutions and the passions of your hearts. But can you tell how this happens, or why mere sounds, which are but agitations of the air, have the power of producing such effects? You behold the earth covered with verdure, grass growing for cattle, and herb for the service of men. But can you tell either how the grass grows, or serves for nourishment, or changes into flesh and sinews and bones? No, my brethren, on these points, and all others of a similar kind, the most enlightened philosopher, though he may have unveiled some steps of the process, and learned to pronounce some hard names concerning it, is at bottom, and with regard to the real acting causes, as ignorant as the most un-instructed of the people. Your ignorance on these

these points, from being familiar to you, may pass unobserved ; but it is not on that account less real.

If this then be the condition of all our knowledge, why should we expect that our knowledge of divine things should form an exception to the general law, and that the facts of revelation should be more explicable by us than parallel facts in the world of sense ? These facts constitute all that is necessary to impress our hearts and direct our conduct ; and they are recorded in scripture with sufficient clearness and precision. That God is, and governs the world ; that though strictly one, he manifests himself under the three characters borne by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ; that in the character of Son he interposed, in human form, to make atonement for sin, and to ransom from destruction the race he had created ; that as the Holy Ghost, he renews them in the spirit of their mind, comforts them in sorrow, and aids them in the struggles of virtue ; that men are destined for immortality ; that the dominion which death exercises over them is to be subverted, and that they shall all be re-
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called from his cold embrace to stand before their Judge, and receive according to the deeds done in the body—These are facts of which a Christian who believes the scripture can no more be ignorant, than he can be ignorant of the objects that strike his senses; and our inability to explain questions of speculative curiosity respecting them can no more intitle us to reject them, than our inability to explain similar questions respecting sensible objects can entitle us to reject the existence of the material world. In both cases we know all that is essential to our happiness; and we ought not in either case to cast from us the gift of heaven, because it is not equal to our wishes. *Secret things belong unto the Lord; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do them.*

It is obvious then, my brethren, that the prejudice entertained against Christianity on account of the nature and abstruseness of its doctrines has no just foundation. It arises from a vain desire to overshoot, in this department of knowledge, that limit which the wisdom of heaven has fixed to all our enquiries in this world. The only

reasonable question therefore on the subject must relate, not to our power of explaining these doctrines, but to the evidence on which we believe that they have actually been revealed. If that evidence be sufficient in kind and degree to support our faith, we are bound to receive the facts which rest on it, as just principles of action, and as a valuable portion of our intellectual treasure. On this point, however, complaints have often been made, and sometimes by pious and well disposed men. They have entertained a prejudice against Christianity, because

III. They think that the proof of its descent from God is not so explicit and convincing as might have been expected.

I shall proceed to the consideration of this prejudice in my next Sermon.

SERMON V.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, XXVIII, 17.

—*And when they saw him, they worshipped him,
but some doubted.*

I NOW proceed, as I proposed, at the conclusion of my last Sermon, to consider the prejudice which has been entertained, and sometimes by pious and well disposed men, against Christianity, because

They think that the proof of its descent from God is not so explicit and convincing as might have been expected.

If the merciful Father of all, say they, had intended to make a revelation to his creatures, he would have accompanied it with such commanding evidence that no room would have been left for suspicion or doubt concerning its origin. The Lord of nature would have entered on his bene-

ficent work with irresistible attestations to his authority : his commission would have been written in the skies : the sign from heaven would have been given to the demand of his contemporaries : and earth, through all its regions, would have beheld in future times unquestionable proofs of his mission : for a revelation that cannot be infallibly distinguished from imposture is equivalent to no revelation at all.

Such has been the language of those who have paid but little attention to this subject. They forget that the evidence which they require is not compatible with the circumstances of man ; that it is unlike all the evidence which providence has given for directing his conduct ; and that the gift of it would be pernicious, by precluding the due exercise of his understanding, and annihilating the very principles of his moral constitution.

I admit readily that the evidence which supports the divine authority of the gospel does not instantly and irresistibly compel the assent of the understanding. Even candid men may fairly question its validity. But I maintain that this defect (if defect it may

may be called) is inseparable from the subject, and common to it with every branch of our practical knowledge. All the information which, in the ordinary affairs of the world, moves the springs of action within us may be resisted. Our conclusion is the result of a comparison between conflicting circumstances, and is liable to much uncertainty and doubt. It is only in cases of pure abstract speculation that infallible and necessary conviction can be found. Wherever we are called to act, either in the pursuit or in the defence of happiness, we must trust to inferior evidence. We must have recourse, not to demonstration, but to dubious inferences from testimony, experience, and analogy. Probability is the great guide of human conduct, and it is wisely appointed that we must accept it in all the most important concerns of our present condition.—What, my brother, is the blessing which you reckon most valuable on earth, and on which you have set the warmest wish of your heart? Is it health of body? And does either you or your physician know, with infallible certainty, the pre-

cautions which will preserve it in vigour, or the medicines which will restore it when lost? Are you toiling for fame, or labouring to heap up a fortune? And can you point out any scheme, that in spite of every accident, will invariably put you in possession of them? Can the soldier, when he girdeth on his armour, boast like him that putteth it off? Can the merchant predict that the speculation, on which he has entered, will be infallibly crowned with success? Can even the husbandman, who has the promise of God that seed-time and harvest shall not fail, look forward with assured confidence to the expected increase of his fields? No, my brethren, in these and in all similar cases, our resolution to act can be founded on probability alone, and on a probability so much the feebler, that the accidents which beset all human plans are incalculable: For, under the sun of this uncertain world, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.*

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There can be no doubt, then, Christians, that, in all the most important business of this life, we must submit to be guided by information founded on imperfect evidence. We must balance probabilities against each other; and our obligation to act or to forbear, can result only from our estimate of the preponderance. If, then, this be the case with all the most important interests of this world, why should we expect that the interests of the world to come should be placed on a different footing? Is it not reasonable to believe, that the measures of the divine government are uniform? that in similar circumstances similar modes of operating will appear? that the appointed means of human improvement will be marked throughout with the same characters? and that, consequently, our power of distinguishing and pursuing our eternal happiness will be subjected to the same impediments which affect our discernment and pursuit of happiness in the life that now is?

Nor have we any reason to be dissatisfied that our Creator has left us in this state of comparative uncertainty concerning the

means both of present and of future enjoyment. He has given, with respect to both, evidence sufficient to determine the choice of candid and attentive men: and more perhaps could not have been given, without destroying that balance among our mental powers which fits us for improvement. The obscurity, which rests on the issue of all temporal projects, was ordained in wisdom. It is the great spur to intellectual exertion. It creates those difficulties which exercise and sharpen the faculties of the understanding, and makes room for all that diversity of talent in the management of business, which is the ornament and the blessing of human society.

The imperfect evidence therefore which accompanies our practical knowledge of temporal things is essential to our best interests. And we have reason to believe that advantages of no less importance result from a similar imperfection in the evidence of religious truth. It leaves room for that exercise of candid attention and judgment which constitutes the trial of the understanding, and gives to faith its genuine value. It preserves a due balance between

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tween the objects of sense and the objects of eternity. And it prevents the affairs of this world, destined, in its present form, to be the scene of our improvement, from being totally deranged by the overbearing splendour of the state which is to follow them.

Nay, the obscurity to which I now refer is indispensibly necessary for preserving untouched the principles of our moral constitution. Had the evidence of Christianity been irresistible and beyond all possibility of doubt, where would have been that freedom of choice, which is the highest prerogative of our rational nature, and which is requisite to constitute us proper subjects of reward and punishment? The accountable condition of man would have been totally destroyed by it. Though he would still be subject to the laws of heaven, his obedience would be no longer voluntary. Like that of the inferior creation, it would be the mere effect of compulsion. It would not consequently deserve the name of virtue: it could have no moral value; nor form any ground to him either of consolation or of hope!

It follows then that this kind of evidence which the sceptic requires is not suited to the nature of religion, and that any revelation which pretended to give it would bear on its face irrefragable proofs that it did not come from God.

But though religion does not admit of evidence absolutely irresistible either in kind or degree; yet it ought to be rational; that is, it should furnish proofs sufficient to satisfy a reasonable mind, and to lay a just foundation for moral conduct. The case here is precisely similar to the business in ordinary life. Superiority, not infallibility, of evidence creates your obligation. For the purposes of action, you must candidly weigh the probabilities, and allow your mind to be determined by that which preponderates.—Would you think yourself at liberty to neglect the interests of your family; because you foresee difficulties in every plan that presents itself to your choice? Do you refuse to lend out your money, or to vest it in schemes of profit; because in the course of worldly accidents, there is a possibility, or even a hazard that it may never return to you?

Would your conscience permit you to neglect the defence of your country, because you may not see the wisdom of all the measures that are adopted by your rulers for that end? And can you then believe that you may safely neglect the great salvation, and the interests depending on it; because you meet some difficulties in the evidence which establishes its descent from heaven? No, my brethren. In all such cases, the path of duty is clear, and a fair impartial mind will not hesitate to pursue it. It will balance all the circumstances: it will select the general conclusion to which they lead; and without waiting for the removal of every minute scruple, it will act instantly and without fear, on the impulse which that conclusion gives.

Now, if we adopt this reasonable rule of judging respecting the evidence of revelation, there can be little doubt concerning the consequences that must follow from it. This evidence, I have already stated, is, from the very nature of things, and for the wisest purposes, mingled with some imperfections; but when weighed in the scale against the doubts which oppose it, it possesses a most
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manifest preponderance. On the one side we have only difficulties without one particle of direct evidence: on the other we have proofs of powerful weight, and of the same kind with those which determine all the most interesting and solemn transactions of this world. As soon as we open our eyes, we see around us a system of religious truths, which reason could not have discovered, universally directing the judgments of the people, and regarded by them as a revelation from God. We feel that the principles, which this system inculcates, are consistent with each other and with the best affections of the human heart; that they are admirably suited to the circumstances of our present condition, highly conducive to the perfection of our moral powers, in all respects most worthy of the origin which they claim, and therefore, not unlikely to have descended from on high. These principles we can trace, by the most unquestionable historic evidence, to an humble uninstructed Galilean, who, as a man, could never have devised them; but who claimed to be received as a messenger from God; and who, according to the undeniable

able acknowledgement of his contemporaries, authenticated his claim by every proof which we can conceive as indicating a divine commission—by a life free from every stain of human infirmity—by the most exact fulfilment of an extensive series of ancient predictions which met in him, as in their center—and by the public performance of many miraculous works, which no man could do unless God were with him, and which according to the unanimous and well sifted testimony of those who saw him, were crowned in the end by his own resurrection from the dead, and by his triumphant return to the place from whence he came. This, christians, is evidence of a very satisfying kind. Confirmed as it has been, in all its parts, through the most jealous and penetrating scrutiny, it bears on it the genuine stamp of heaven, and imposes on every reflecting mind an obligation to act conformably to it. Let us therefore open our hearts to its influence ; and embracing the truth in the love of it, let us receive it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth the word of God, that
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it may work in us effectually to the sanctification of our spirit and to eternal life.

But those who doubt concerning the truth of christianity seldom fix their eye steadily on the direct evidence by which it is supported. They turn aside to irrelevant circumstances connected with it, and perplex themselves because these circumstances do not correspond to the anticipations they had formed. Hence we find them objecting to christianity still farther

IV. That it has in a great measure failed to produce the effect for which it pretends to have been given, and that, therefore, it cannot have come from that God who doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and whose purpose nothing can defeat. Had he commissioned his Son to enlighten and reform the children of men, *his word would not have returned unto him void ; but would have accomplished what he pleased, and prospered in the thing to which he sent it.*

The whole force of this objection evidently rests on the assumption that God could not be the Author of Christianity,
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unless he had intended to produce a much more complete and extensive reformation than has in fact resulted from it. But on what ground have we a title to make this assumption? It is obvious that the light of nature can give it no support, because the whole purpose and scheme of revelation is totally beyond the sphere of its discovery. And revelation itself, so far from supporting it, has expressly declared that the religion of Christ would meet with great opposition; that *he was set for a sign to be spoken against*; that *his word would not profit unless mixed with faith in them that heard it*; that even of those to whom it should be preached *few would find the narrow way that leadeth unto life*; and that *many would say unto him, Lord, Lord, who should never enter into the kingdom of heaven*. To this objection, therefore, it might be sufficient simply to reply, that it rests wholly on an unfounded supposition, and can therefore have no effect whatever in the scale of evidence against the gospel.

But as pious men have sometimes perplexed their minds with difficulties which take their rise from this prejudice, it may
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be useful to examine it more carefully. For this purpose we shall consider separately the two charges into which it naturally resolves itself: Christianity has not reformed the conduct, even of those among whom it has been received; and there are many nations of the earth to which it has never been able to convey any portion of its influence.

As to the first of these complaints, that the gospel has failed in reforming even those among whom it has been received, we must admit that the fact, to a certain extent, is indisputable. The lives of christians are too often a reproach to their profession. Deceit, and hatred, and impurity still maintain too extensive an influence in the world; and from christian lands the sigh of the oppressed, and the voice of blood, shed without cause, still rise to heaven crying for vengeance on the inhabitants of the earth. But though christianity has not totally killed the roots of corruption in the hearts of its professors, it cannot be seriously maintained that no beneficial effects have resulted from it. Is it a thing credible in itself that principles so pure, motives

so penetrating, hopes so sublime and ravishing can mingle daily and hourly with the springs from which our actions flow, and yet communicate to them no tincture of estimable qualities? can any candid, enlightened man compare the state of christendom, corrupted as it is, with the state of heathen countries, either in ancient or in modern times, and not be struck with the obvious difference between them? History indeed exhibits a melancholy picture of them both; but history, from its very nature, is chiefly a register of the passions, and contests, and crimes of nations. It gives no just view of the private condition of the people, nor of the moral principles by which they are habitually guided. These principles paint themselves more correctly on the system of their laws, on the character of their institutions, and on the general complexion of their usages and manners. And if in these respects we compare the state of christian countries with that of the most celebrated nations in the heathen world, we shall perceive at once the benignant influence of the gospel. By refining the moral taste of the people, it has paved the way for

many salutary changes on the whole of their condition. Through this channel it has gradually communicated a portion of its equitable and humane spirit to the civil and criminal jurisprudence of all the nations who have embraced it. It has banished licentiousness and obscenity from the temples of religion, their former licenced abodes. It has smoothed the face of war, by protecting the captive from slavery, and communicating to the vanquished the rights of brethren in Christ. It has reared, on firmer foundations, hospitals for the sick, and receptacles for the poor, and schools for the ignorant. It hath improved beyond conception the condition of domestic life by the prohibition of polygamy and causeless divorce. By raising the female sex to their due place, as partners of man in the road to immortality, it hath restored at once respectability and comfort to one half of the rational creation. Through its day of rest, it conveys to the labourer refreshment and spiritual wisdom. To the afflicted it imparts patience and fortitude by the hope of that heaven for which the sufferings of life are destined to prepare him. And by the
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whole tendency of its doctrines and institutions, it hath spread through all ranks that general regard to decent and becoming conduct, which has either totally extirpated many of the most offensive and abominable vices of the pagan world, or driven them into the shade of concealment. It cannot therefore be said with truth that christianity has failed in its design of reforming those who receive it. No, my brethren, the christian world, in point both of intellectual and moral culture, rises far above all the other portions of this globe. And its inhabitants, wherever they go, behold the slaves of superstition, regarding them with reverence, overawed by the superiority of their attainments, and bending before them as beings of a higher order.

But why, it may be asked, is its effect incomplete? Why do not the lands blessed with its light, display a perfect image of paradise, and shine with all the beauties of immaculate virtue?

The reasons are obvious. Christian countries are still full of men who know not the gospel. And of those who know it, how many are there who care for none of these

things ! how many whose minds are blinded by the God of this world ! how many who have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows ! As it was of old, so is it now ; *They were not all Israel, who were of Israel* : neither are they all christians who name the name of Christ. And why should we expect that, in these circumstances, the full effect of christian doctrine should be seen ? Can it be required to operate where it is not admitted, or to purify the hearts of those who labour to subvert it ? Tares, for the wisest purposes, are still sown with the wheat. They must grow up together until the end of the world. And till that predicted period come, the righteous cannot form a pure and perfect society, where Christ shall reign in visible majesty, and into which shall not enter any thing that defileth or that worketh abomination.

But it has been often said, why has not God rendered christianity more irresistible ? Why has he not compelled the reluctant to come in, and to submit themselves to the sceptre of his grace ? Alas, my brother of the dust, dost thou not perceive that this question

question, in its consequences, affects not christianity alone, but the whole plan of the divine government on earth ; and that at bottom, it is equivalent to the question, why free agents, like men, occupy a place in the creation ? In no instance dost thou see the Almighty appearing directly in the effects that are produced around thee. A series of means in regular succession is every where employed to accomplish the ends of providence ; and these means are uniformly adapted to the nature of the beings on which they are to operate, and of the effect which they are intended to produce. On rational agents, and for the production of moral ends, they can act only in the way of motive. They must leave the choice free. For a compulsive reformation of free agents is a contradiction in terms. By destroying the distinction between physical and moral action, it would subvert the very foundation on which moral reformation can rest, and reduce man, in point of virtue, to a level with the inanimate objects around him.

The compelling power, therefore, which infidels sometimes require as an appendage

of divine revelation, is totally inconsistent with the present constitution of human nature, and with the plan of divine government respecting it. Such a power would convert us into machines which could act only as they are moved from without. It would put an end to the whole moral system, and through it to the source of whatever is most attractive and ennobling in the visible universe of God.

But though the infidel must admit that a religion intended for the moral improvement of men cannot employ compulsive means; and that those whom christianity addresses may, therefore, through their own fault, fail to draw from it all the advantages which it is fitted to impart; yet he is still disposed to rejoin, with an air of triumph, Why have not the whole race had an opportunity at least of profiting by what it reveals? why have not its advantages, such as they are, been universally disseminated? God, surely, is no respecter of persons: he is the common Parent of all his children; and there can be no reason for withholding from any of them the means of improvement which have been found useful to

a few. Why, then, was not his gospel revealed earlier? and why has the knowledge of it been confined to a small corner of the earth? why hath he not given to it as well as to the material sun, *a circuit from one end of the heavens to the other, and left nothing hidden from its heat?*

To this objection it might be sufficient to reply that we are not competent judges of the ways of God, and that there may be many reasons, unknown to us, why he maketh one period of time, and one part of the earth to differ from another. All arguments of this kind, where one of the premises rests upon our ignorance, are unsound. They are contrary to the established rules of just reasoning, and would scarcely be entitled to an answer, even though their other premise were an incontrovertible truth.

But, in the present instance, where is the evidence on which we can be required to admit the general proposition that God ought to communicate to all his children the same advantages? Reason surely gives it no countenance, for reason tells us that He who bestows freely, may bestow in the

manner and proportion he pleases ; and that *the potter hath power over the clay, out of the same lump, to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour.* Can we then infer it from experience ? Look around thee and see if thou canst discover it, in that endless variety of condition, of talent and of privilege which the works of the Almighty every where present to thy attention ? Dost thou not see in the heavens above thee one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and one star differing from another star in glory ? If thou confinest thy view to this earth, does not a similar gradation of glories meet thine eye ? even with regard to the human race is there any one gift of God in which thou seest all thy brethren upon a level ? Is it health, or strength, or riches, or understanding, or good disposition, or the means of intellectual and moral improvement ? It is obvious that, in respect to these and to every other endowment, there is great diversity. The universal Parent distributes his blessings as to him seemeth meet. He distributes them in proportions which to our short-sighted wis-

dom often appear capricious and partial ; but which multiply the sources of enjoyment, and, under his direction, contribute in the result to the wider diffusion of happiness and to the greater manifestation of his glory.

We have no right therefore either from reason, or from our experience of the divine procedure in other cases, to expect that the light of revelation should be communicated equally to all mankind. Nay, from attention to the history of providence we may see ground for concluding that its diffusion would be slow and gradual. For all the works of God seem to reach their destined perfection by progressive advances ; and in each of them the previous steps of the progress are necessary to prepare the way for those that are to follow. Creation itself, as we learn both from scripture and from the present structure of the Globe, was a progressive work. The different forms of organisation, of vegetable life, and of animal perception were in their turn, and in due succession, superinduced on rude matter, before man arose, blessed with the image of his maker, and endowed with the
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new powers of reason and conscience. We still see man himself, in consequence of the principles of his nature, and of connections with his kind, advancing through successive steps to new degrees of knowledge, of culture and of happiness. We see that each stage of this advance has its proper place, and can be reached only through the stages appointed to precede it. We behold the light of philosophy, as one of these stages, coming forth late in the progress, and receiving its perfection through frequent interruptions, and by a long succession of circumstances arranged by providence for promoting its improvement. We never suppose that this light should have shone on rude ages, or that it can be propagated with equal rapidity among all nations, whatever their intellectual condition may be. Why then should we be surprised at the late appearance of that brighter light which is supplementary to the light of nature, and destined to remove its defects? Or why after it has appeared, should we expect it to be instantaneous in its progress, and to pervade the different tribes of mankind before they have reached the point of cultivation
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necessary to qualify them for its reception? The plan of God for the final perfection of our race consists of many parts. These parts bear to each other mutual relations. They have their appointed order and succession, and every land must wait with patience for the glory of its Zion, till the time to favour her, even the set time shall come. To us, who pass away like the flower of the grass, that time may seem to be long protracted. But we ought to know that the human race is more permanent in its duration; that the arrangements of God for its improvement embrace an extensive series of events; that *one day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*; and that in his plan of mercy, a period is fixed *when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

On this point the pious and well instructed Christian has no ground for apprehension. He knows that his religion is, from its excellence, and from the nature of its institutions, fitted to become universal. He has already seen the arm of God going forth with it, and subjecting to its power all the most enlightened kingdoms of this globe.

globe. He sees it shining already, by indirect reflections, through the darkness of heathen countries. He beholds especially many of its most essential principles, and even the belief of its descent from heaven retained amid the corruptions of the Mahometan delusion, and spread with this delusion through nations that are not qualified to receive the truth in its purity. He observes, in the gradual diffusion of knowledge, of arts, of commerce, and of civilisation, means preparing in secret for its farther triumphs: and confiding in the promise of the Omniscient, he anticipates the day when all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him.

In the mean time, satisfied that God is just, and that from them to whom little has been given, the less will be required, he rejoices in the hope which the gospel has opened to all the penitent. He rejoices especially to think that the salvation which it reveals is not confined to those alone who have heard of it by the hearing of the ear.

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He rejoices in the strong reasons which induce him to believe that the benefits of Christ's death extend far beyond the visible limits of the Christian Church; that he is the lamb slain in efficacy from the foundation of things; that he is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; that as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive, and that, at the last day, many holy men from every land, redeemed by his blood, shall come from the east and from the west, and with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, shall sit down with him and his apostles in the kingdom of heaven.

It appears therefore that the prejudice against Christianity drawn from its want of success has no better foundation than the rest. All of them, when examined, are found to arise from incorrect views of the divine administration, and of the manner in which a revelation from God ought to accomplish its end. A reasonable man therefore, in estimating the evidence of the gospel, will not think it his duty to pay much regard to them. Turning away his eye from such adventitious irrelative considerations

derations, he will fix it directly on the evidence itself; and if that evidence appear to him to have any force, he will think himself bound to allow his mind to be determined by it. For this is not one of those speculative questions, on which a man is at liberty to suspend his assent. It is an important practical point, where it is not possible for us to avoid choosing our part; and where the suspension of our assent would in its consequences be equivalent to our rejection of all the blessings which the gospel promises. The alternative here is tremendous. Unless therefore we clearly see—(what no man who considers the subject for a moment will venture to assert)—unless we clearly see that the evidence of Christianity is a fiction, let us not have the madness to reject the counsel of God against ourselves. To us it has been given to hear what many prophets and righteous men of old desired to hear, and were not permitted. Let us not be unthankful for the privilege. Let us esteem it according to its true value. And let it be the sincere resolution of our hearts that we will listen to
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whatever has been commanded us of God, and that we will walk in all his ordinances blameless.

And may his grace preserve us from falling, and enable us to do what is acceptable in his sight through Jesus Christ. Amen.

SERMON VI.

HEBREWS, XII. 3.

—*Consider him that endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

THE life and sufferings of Jesus may be viewed in various aspects, from all of which we might derive valuable materials of meditation. At present I mean to consider his state on earth as an image of ours, and the conduct he observed in it as a pattern for our direction and support. *In all things he was made like unto his brethren*; and from an attentive consideration of his history in this respect, we receive much interesting and useful instruction concerning the nature and design of our present condition; concerning the temper with which we should bear its various incidents; concerning

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ning our power of bending them to advance our true interest ; and concerning the state of higher perfection for which they are all intended to prepare us.

I. The history of Christ's humiliation may suggest to us that our present condition, even when it seems to be most insignificant, is intended for valuable ends.

The succession of changes which compose the present condition of man exhibits at first view a very perplexing appearance. It seems to proceed without any order or design, and to lead to no visible consequence which may serve as a key to unlock the hidden mystery. We come into life feeble, helpless and dependent, ignorant both of our origin and of our destination. We pass through it on a tide of events which rise and flow on without our appointment, which are guided by powers foreign to us, which are often in apparent contradiction to each other, and which are soon lost in the tide of new events that are equally independent on us, and seemingly as irregular and unconnected as those which preceded them. In these circumstances we

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are extremely apt to undervalue our present condition and its duties ; and to conclude that it is of little importance to ourselves and to the world, in what manner each of us shall act. “ Our actions”, we say, “ are like light straws which float on the surface of the stream, and which can neither stop nor alter its current. Why then should we disquiet ourselves about an order of things on which we have no influence ? Why should we refuse ourselves to any pleasure that rises in our way ? If we be poor, why should we hesitate about the employment of any means that may increase our store ? And if we be rich, why should we not enjoy, as we list, the abundance that has fallen to our lot. We know not what may happen hereafter. Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die”.

To these corrupting views and conclusions the history of the Son of man, when we consider his life as an image of the human condition in general, affords a most powerful antidote. It teaches us that the circumstances of our present life are to be considered as means towards some farther end,

end, and to be estimated by their subservience to it ; that we are parts of a great connected whole ; and that every action we perform, however insignificant or unconnected it may appear, forms an important link in the chain of events, and has its proper influence both on our own destiny, and on the general progress and perfection of the system.

When Jesus descended to this earth what was there in his appearance that could have led us to regard him as the messenger of heaven ? Did the splendour of his parentage announce the dignity of his mission ? Or did his worldly condition improve as he advanced towards the termination of his appointed work ? No, Christians ! The congratulations of the angels on the plains of Bethlehem, and of the wise men who came from the east to pay him homage, must have seemed to his mother and her contemporaries only as the insult of malicious fortune sporting with his misery. For they saw him compelled to pass his infancy as an exile in a foreign country ; to spend his youth as a fugitive in a remote district of the land, far from the original dwellings of his

his kindred ; to struggle throughout life with the hardships of poverty and oppression ; to suffer unexampled persecutions from the calumnies and opposition of those whom he came to save ; and at last, as the vilest of malefactors, to finish his days on a Cross. In the outward circumstances of his lot therefore we find no indications of his superior worth. In this respect *his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men.* Yet, during all this time he was the beloved of the Father, actively employed in promoting the salvation of men, and in executing a most benevolent plan for extending the limits of the moral kingdom. His fate, conformable in all respects to the intimations of ancient prophecy, entwined itself with the general fate of his country, and with the future destinies of the whole human race. All the parts of it though apparently unconnected among themselves, were closely linked to the great end of his mission, and arranged by providence for securing its success. Even his sorrows, through all their details, were conducive to the perfection of his character and the consummation

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tion of his work. For *though he was a son ; yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered ; and being made perfect through sufferings, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.*

From this view of our Saviour's history, we may learn how to estimate the circumstances of our present earthly condition. However unaccountable and discouraging these circumstances may seem, they cannot be unimportant ; for the Son of God appeared in them, and gave us an example of the noble ends to which they may be made subservient. He hath shewn us that they are the means through which, in our respective stations, we carry forward the plans of providence, and rise to the destined perfection of our nature. Their value, therefore, is not to be estimated by the degree in which they display present prosperity or adversity, but by their tendency to produce consequences advantageous to ourselves, and to the great system of which we form a part.

Viewed in this light the condition of every individual, and the part he acts in it, assume an interest and value which are

highly pleasing to a virtuous mind. The various lots of men appear through it equalized; and each of us is seen occupying a station, where he has an opportunity of fulfilling the end of his creation, and of promoting the general good of the universe. The question respecting the importance of that station is not, whether it be externally prosperous and successful; but whether it affords the means of cultivating our talents, and of advancing the designs of heaven. None of us indeed can have an influence on these designs equal to the Son of God. We resemble him not in the extent of our power; but in the circumstances in which we are called to exert it. These circumstances, even when they seem to be most unpropitious, are arranged by the wisdom of providence to suit our particular constitution, and to influence the formation of our character, and through it the fate of our brethren. No man on this earth stands insulated and alone; nor can any event of his life be without its consequence. He is connected with parents, with children, with kindred, with a country, with the community of mankind in
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this world, and with the society of glorified spirits in heaven. His conduct in the sphere which he fills will have an immediate or remote influence on them all. It is this influence which communicates value and importance to his condition ; and this influence, as we learn from the history of Jesus, may be as effectual from a cross as from a throne.

Let no man therefore complain that his state on earth is of little value. Its value is to be estimated, not by its outward splendor or outward meanness, for these are accidental and transient ; but by its fitness to exercise and improve the virtues of his character. It may be poor, and distressed, and covered with misfortunes. And what then? Poverty and distress and misfortunes are in themselves no degradation. They come from God ; they are sent for benevolent ends ; they were the lot of Jesus even when working out the salvation of our race ; and were in fact the appointed means of his success. They may be intended for similar ends in your case. Fulfil, therefore, my Christian brother, fulfil the duties of the station which you occupy, whatever it may

be, convinced that it is the station which the wisdom of your Father has chosen for you ; that its value depends on the moral application which you make of it ; that you may obey the will of God in a cottage as cheerfully and effectually as in a palace ; and that the man who obeys his will, though under a covering of rags, is far more acceptable to his maker, and far happier in himself, than the mightiest and most prosperous potentate who neglects it.

II. The history of our Saviour's conduct may teach us the temper with which we ought to bear the events of our earthly condition.

These events, as we have already seen, are often intricate and perplexing. At our entrance upon life we cannot foresee the situations through which we are destined to pass, nor the circumstances of distress or of comfort by which they shall be chequered. Prosperity and adversity succeed each other apparently in the most capricious forms ; they change into each other by sudden and unaccountable transitions ; and the appearances of this day give no
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certain indication of what is to be our fortune to-morrow. An awful darkness rests on the whole future condition of our life ; and it is of the utmost importance to have a guide to conduct us through the unknown and unexpected dangers which it may present to us.

For this purpose, *Consider*, O thou who art disposed to complain of thy fate ! *Consider him who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself.* His life was chequered like thine. Gleams of light issued at times from the black cloud of sorrows that encompassed him, and seemed to promise an evening of prosperity. When he entered his Father's temple, and expelled from it the merchants and the changers of money, he was obeyed as the messenger of heaven. When he fed the five thousand, the multitudes flocked after him, and sought to make him a King. And when at the time of his last passover, he approached the ancient capital of his country, its inhabitants went forth to meet him, spread their garments in his way, and welcomed him as the predicted Saviour of their nation. But these temporary gleams of prosperity were
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soon lost amid the general darkness of his fate. The great and permanent features of his earthly condition were deep affliction and sorrow. He had to maintain a struggle with poverty, reproach and pain, in a degree far beyond the ordinary lot of mankind; and to die at last in the midst of infamy and torture. But with what firmness, composure and resignation, did he bear the trials that rose in succession before him! He viewed them in their just light as the will of God for accomplishing the objects of his mission; and in spite of the repugnance of his natural sensibility, through habitual devotion and prayer, he advanced without shrinking to the trials of obedience. *I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! The cup which my Father hath given me shall I not drink? O Father! if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.*

In like manner, it becomes us to preserve an equal mind through all the changes of fortune, and especially to suffer with resignation and patience the adverse allotments
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of our condition. Regarding them as appointed in wisdom for our good, we ought to welcome them as the will of our Father. Though we may be unable to pierce the cloud which covers the divine throne, and to perceive the way by which afflictions operate in promoting our improvement, we ought to submit to them as the chastenings of God who grieveth not willingly the children of men. Though nature must tremble at the prospect of their approach; and though we may pray earnestly to be delivered from them; yet we ought not to suffer ourselves to question the benevolence of their appointment, nor to murmur against the providence which permits them; nor to employ unlawful means for escaping from their attack. Knowing that the path of affliction was hallowed by the Son of God, and looking forward to the glories that enlighten its termination, it becomes us to tread it with a firm step, practising the suffering virtues, and acquiring gradually the steady, devout, and heavenly mind to which it leads.

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But we must not satisfy ourselves with submitting passively to the current of events. We must labour to convert them into means of advancing our good. And for this purpose Christ

III. Has taught us by his conduct that their power over us is not irresistible, and that in the most essential points we may bend them to promote our true interests.

On a slight view of human things the sources of happiness and misery seem to lie without—in causes that are foreign to us, and over which we have scarcely any controul. Our health depends on that texture of bodily constitution which we receive from nature: our rank in the world depends commonly on the rank of our progenitors: the security of our persons and of our enjoyments changes with every change in the circumstances of our political condition: and our means both of intellectual and moral improvement, are intimately connected with the general improvement of our country, and the state of society into which we have been cast. May it then be said that our destiny is irreversibly determined

mined by causes that are independent of us, and that all our efforts to alter it must be for ever vain? No, Christians, the causes of human improvement, and of human happiness reside within ourselves, in the energies of a free and virtuous mind. External events furnish only the occasions which call these energies into action, and they may be modified by us at our will. Our life is appointed to be a struggle with difficulties; our glory and our enjoyment arise from conquering them; the strength of heaven is ready to assist us in the combat; and no man who has exerted steadily and with perseverance the powers he received from heaven has ever retired from it in defeat.

Of these truths the life of Christ affords a striking illustration. If you doubt your power to overcome the obstacles in your way to perfection, contemplate the history of the Son of man. Can your circumstances wear a more unfavourable appearance than his? He was subjected like you to the laws of the material world, and to the infirmities of a frail body. He appeared as the descendant of a fallen family. He was bred to a mean occupation. He was the inhabi-
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tant of a contemptible village in a country which had never risen high in the scale of improvement, and which at this time lay bleeding under the disgraceful scourge of foreign domination. Adversity seemed to have collected against him the whole host of her oppressions, and to have withheld from his youthful mind every thing that could tend to awaken its energies, or fire it to generous exertions. But did he sink under the difficulties of his condition? Did he tamely submit to be dragged along by the course of his external fortune? No. He met the trials of his lot with a bold unconquerable spirit, and compelled them to minister to his perfection and advancement. At the age of twelve, we find him beginning to soar above the disadvantages of his humble rank; and, though a carpenter's son, gathering wisdom from a disputation with the doctors in the temple. At a later period he encountered with success the assaults of the devil, and amid all the persecutions which followed, he maintained the dignity of a free, independent mind, discharging without interruption the duties of his mission, forming the merit that was to purchase

chase the salvation of our race, and opening even through suffering, the splendid path which conducted him at last to the Father's right hand. The angels of heaven beheld with admiration his struggle with the powers of darkness, and descended with delight to his support. God, who never deserts those who desert not themselves, seconded the efforts of his virtue, combined the circumstances that were favourable to his progress, and set him as King on the holy hill of Zion.

Let us, christians, in our humble sphere, strive by similar efforts to bend the course of events to our purpose. Let us regard this world as the theatre of our probation, and its events as the trials through which we must rise to spiritual perfection. Instead therefore of yielding to them, let us oppose their influence whenever it becomes corrupting; let us shew that we are not their slaves; and let us by steady resistance and exertion, form those habits of self command, which restore to the mind its due superiority, and render the most arduous duties easy to be performed. We possess, through the bounty of heaven, a portion of
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the same powers which resided in the human nature of Christ ; we may rely on the same aid from on high which strengthened him ; and if we do our duty, our father hath promised to cause all things to work together for our good. Why then should you vex yourself about external circumstances ? Whatever they may be, it is in your power to bend them to the only valuable purpose which external circumstances can serve—to render them the instruments of virtue, and of preparation for heaven. Endure, therefore, through all the varieties of your fortune, as seeing him who is invisible ; implore the support of his spirit in the contest which he thus calls you to maintain ; preserve throughout life the mastery of your mind ; and *the light afflictions of this life, which are but for a moment, will work out for you a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory.* For we learn from the history of Christ,

IV. That the struggles and exertions of this mortal life conduct him who overcomes to a state of never ending perfection and happiness in heaven.

Many circumstances lead us to suspect that the events of this life do not terminate in itself; that they are only parts of an incompleted plan; and that they extend their influence into another scene where their full consequences will be produced, and where we shall see them in their effects, freed from the darkness and seeming disorder which now rest on them. Of this connection between our present state and a condition of greater glory hereafter, you have a shining example in the fates of your Redeemer. Though he was despised and rejected of men, yet his earthly labours, unimportant as they seemed, laid the foundations of a spiritual kingdom which soon extended over the most enlightened nations of this globe, and which is still destined to spread, *till it reach from sea to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the world.* In consequence of these labours he himself is now seated in the highest heavens, *far above all principality and power, and might and dominion—Being found in fashion as a man, says the apostle, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God hath highly*

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exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth ; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. For the joy thus set before him he endured the Cross and despised the shame. And his followers are encouraged by a similar motive to hold fast their integrity through all the temptations which now assail them. Their conduct on earth may, through channels which they cannot foresee, produce important consequences to their families and to their country : it may involve in it the seeds of future improvement to the whole human race : in all events it will determine the everlasting condition of their own spirits, and prepare for them happiness or misery without mixture and without end. For amidst the trials of your earthly pilgrimage, your Redeemer hath called on you to fix your eye on another state of things to which this world is only introductory, and where, in his presence, ye shall receive the recompence of your labours. *In my Father's house, said he, are many mansions ; I go to prepare*

a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. We are left here for a while to receive the education that may qualify us for heaven. Our present condition furnishes the means of preparing us for the glories of that bright abode *into which shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth or worketh abomination.* Its inhabitants, purified by temptation, as gold is purified by fire, shall be all holy to the Lord; and they shall possess stations varying in dignity according to the degree of virtuous perfection which they have here attained. In that happy land, blessed are they who have come out of great tribulation, who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; for they stand before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. They have fulfilled their appointed task. *They have done his commandments: and therefore they have a right to the tree of life, and have entered through the gate into the blessed city which the Lamb prepareth for the righteous, and which the glory of God doth lighten.*

Such, my brethren, are some of the lights which the history of Christ sheds on the state of man, and on the glorious end to which it shall conduct the good. They are full of encouragement: they exalt unspeakably our conception of the value of our present condition; and they should induce us with willing minds to bear the improving, though severe discipline, by which the wisdom of our Father trains us to perfection. Let the consideration of them fortify our minds for the conflicts with temptation which we may be called to sustain; let them display their influence in the firm and steady virtue of our future conduct. Then may we expect that God will behold us with approbation; and that his spirit will descend in gracious influence to enlighten, to support and to save us. Amen.

SERMON VII.

MATTHEW, IV, 1—11.

—Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. 5 Then the Devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world.

and the glory of them ; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

THIS passage contains a very remarkable part of our Saviour's history. The incidents which it records are highly interesting in themselves : and though they have sometimes been employed by the enemies of Christianity as an occasion of ridicule and contradiction ; yet when viewed with knowledge and in their proper light, they are full of the most important instruction. Let us therefore examine them with attention, and listen to the lessons which they furnish.

The incidents, which are here described, happened at a very decisive period in the life of Christ. He had just left the state of privacy in which his youth was spent ; his approach as the Messiah promised to the Fathers had been publicly announced

to his countrymen by the messenger appointed to prepare the way before him: the spirit of God had descended on him in baptism: and a voice from heaven had declared, *This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.* The time therefore was come for his appearing on a new scene, as the Teacher and Redeemer of mankind. To fulfil all righteousness, and to prove him worthy of his office, it remained only that he should be tried by temptation, and that, in imitation of the ancient prophets, he should prepare himself, by a course of rigid fasting, for the sacred duties he was destined to perform. For this purpose he was led by the spirit of God into the wilderness, that in solitude and abstinence he might form deliberately the plan of his public life, contemplate in all its aspects the arduous work before him, and measure his power against the difficulties with which he would be called to contend. In these exercises and meditations he spent forty days in the barren desert, nourished only by the fruits which it afforded, and exposed to the suggestions of Satan, who in the end collected all his force, and

assailed the appointed Redeemer of mankind with the three powerful temptations which are here recorded.

It cannot surely occur to us as improbable that this messenger of heaven should be exposed to trials. The plan of redemption rendered it expedient that he should assume the character of a son of man; and, as man, he was liable to the same temptations which encompass his followers. It became him to be made like unto his brethren in this respect, both that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest, and that he might set before them an example of resistance and of victory. In the passage before us we see three of the most powerful trials of human virtue brought forth against him and overcome. While at the same time we may learn from his conduct the means which in similar circumstances will enable us to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one, and to stand in the day of temptation.

Now, if there be no improbability in the supposition that Jesus should be subjected to trials, neither can it appear incredible that the agent in conducting these attacks

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on his virtue should have been the same malicious spirit who, in the beginning, deceived our first parents, and gave rise to all the wickedness and misery which we observe among their descendants. This great irreconcilable enemy of mankind is not indeed perceptible by our bodily organs. We cannot see, nor hear, nor touch him, like the material objects around us. But this fact furnishes no argument against his existence and power ; for it is only a small part of the works of God to which the eye of sense extends. Instruments bring within its reach innumerable objects which lie beyond the natural sphere of its vision ; and philosophy is every day discovering to the eye of reason new agents which lie beyond the reach even of instruments, and which were altogether unknown to former times. Can it then seem surprising that revelation should unfold to us a series of such agents—a world of spiritual beings invisible to the bodily eye ; but whose power over man himself, and over the whole system of things around him is great and extensive ? We feel every moment within us the unceasing operations of
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an invisible spiritual mind ; we trace the operation of similar minds in the conduct of our neighbours ; we observe daily the effects of their influence on each other, and on the systems of matter to which they are attached ; and in the course of nature we find irresistible proofs that powers are continually operating whose intimate nature we cannot detect, but which are different from any thing that we see. We are therefore prepared by the natural inferences of our reason to expect a kingdom of invisible agents similar to that which the scriptures reveal. And the experience of evil disposition in ourselves, and of the afflicting disorders which prevail around us, affords sufficient indications that some of these agents are malicious, and leaves no room to question the general account which has been communicated to us from above concerning their history and power.

The general circumstances of our Saviour's temptation, therefore, are in themselves perfectly credible. It was natural that, on the eve of a great undertaking, he should, according to the custom of his country, retire to meditation and fasting.

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It was proper that the appointed guide of mankind, who was to shew them an example of all righteousness, should meet and conquer the trials which they are destined to undergo. And it was therefore indispensable that he should encounter the seductions of that evil one who ruleth in the children of disobedience, and return from the conflict uninjured and triumphant.

But it may be said, though the general circumstances of this history be consistent with the ordinary course of things, and therefore credible ; yet there are in the detail of it certain appearances which cannot be reconciled to our views of nature and of the divine government, and which tend to invalidate our belief of the whole transaction.—To enable us to estimate the force of this objection, it is previously necessary that we know what these appearances are, and whether they result from the history itself, or from our misconception of the narrative which it presents. Even though there were difficulties in the narration which the limited penetration of man could not remove, we should not on this account be entitled to reject it in defiance of regular and well
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supported attestation. But if all the difficulties on which the objection rests arise from misconception—if they may be easily removed by a just interpretation of the passage, it becomes us to receive that interpretation with reverence, to dismiss our suspicions and doubts, and to apply the truths which it suggests for the direction and improvement of our conduct.

The circumstances which occur in this narrative may be viewed in three different lights. They may be viewed as events that happened in the most literal and sensitive meaning which the words can convey; or they may be regarded as the representation of scenes that were exhibited only in vision to the mind of Jesus; or lastly they may be considered as a picturesque and lively description of the seductive conceptions that were actually suggested to his mind by Satan—a description in which the tempter and his arts are brought forth before our imagination as a specimen of what takes place in every temptation that assails us.

I. Those who adopt the first of these views contend that Satan appeared to Christ

in a visible form ; that he conversed with him face to face as one man converses with another ; that he transported him bodily from place to place ; that from a lofty mountain he shewed to him visibly and in a moment all the kingdoms of the earth and all their glory ; that he boldly asked for himself the worship which is due only to the God of heaven ; and, in short, that every circumstance here mentioned happened precisely and literally according to the representation which the evangelists have given of it.

This supposition has been frequently adopted by the interpreters of scripture. But to many wise and pious men it has appeared to be liable to insuperable objections. It supposes that on this occasion Satan openly assumed his true character as the enemy of God, a method of procedure altogether inconsistent with his acknowledged subtilty and address. It represents him as operating on material objects in a mode which we have no reason to believe subordinate spiritual beings can employ. It ascribes to him powers which he cannot be admitted to possess without weakening
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one of the firmest pillars of Christianity, the evidence of miracles. It asserts, in one instance, what to us has the appearance of a direct impossibility, that from one spot were beheld all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And by removing the temptation of Christ out of the usual course of things, it renders the example furnished by it useless either for the direction or the consolation of men under the ordinary trials to which they are exposed.—On account of these irresistible objections to what may be called the corporeal interpretation of the passage, many learned and pious Christians have sought in a figurative acceptation a more consistent, plausible and useful sense. With this view they have had recourse

II. To vision. And in detailing the origin and nature of this supposed visionary scene, two different views of it have been given.

According to one of these views, this vision was produced by Satan who exhibited to Jesus the scenes here described, and excited in him a false persuasion of their reality, though they were only fictitious.—

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It supposes that he was placed, in imagination only, on the pinnacle of the temple ; that the shew of worldly dominion and grandeur presented before him was unsubstantial : and, in short, that the whole was a delusory representation, formed by Satan in the fancy of our Lord, weakened as he was by long continued fasting, and prepared by solitude for regarding the internal fictions of the mind as real existent objects.

This view of the case ascribes to Satan a most unlimited power over the human heart. It supposes that he has at his command our perceptions and opinions, the sources of all our conduct. But this supposition renders us mere machines, moved by foreign powers, and leads by direct consequence to the destruction of our accountability as moral agents. Others therefore have been disposed to regard the scenes here described as a visionary representation excited in the mind of Jesus by the spirit or God, for the purpose of exhibiting to him Satan as his most formidable opponent, and of prefiguring the difficulties which, under the conduct of this arch apostate, would

would embarrass him in the execution of his mediatorial office. According to this account therefore the transactions which are here recorded were a divine prophetic vision of the temptations which Satan would throw in the way of Jesus during the course of his ministry, in order to induce him on some occasions to employ improperly, for supplying his private wants, the miraculous powers, with which he was invested, for public purposes: to propose the evidence of his mission in a more irresistible form than is consistent with our present probationary state: and to comply with the prejudices of the Jews by assuming the splendour and magnificence of a temporal prince.

This interpretation is free from one insuperable objection that lies against the last; but it is exposed to others in its turn. It is too ingenious to be just—too remote from the ordinary use of language to receive the approbation of sober criticism. Besides destroying the use of our Saviour's conduct under temptation as an example to his followers, it rests on a supposition concerning the interposition of the divine spirit

spirit for which the text furnishes no authority, and which is in direct contradiction to the obvious tendency of the whole passage. Jesus was led by the spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of enduring temptation as an appointed part of his earthly trial; but when placed there, he was left to contend with Satan, and not with illusions from on high.

The unsuccessfulness of these attempts to explain the circumstances which are here recorded seem to have arisen not from any real difficulty in the passage itself, but from false preconceptions respecting the nature of our Saviour's temptation. That temptation has, without any reason, been supposed to be totally different in kind from the temptations to which men are exposed; and commentators, misled by this unfounded supposition, have involved themselves in inextricable difficulties concerning it.

The method by which Satan is commonly represented in scripture as seducing mankind is by working on their imagination and on their passions. He does not appear to them himself; but he places before them occasions of sin, influences the train of their

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thoughts, and employs against them all the deceivableness of unrighteousness, by suggesting to their minds such views as are most favourable to his purpose, by inflaming their desires, and through this medium hurrying them forward to the commission of iniquity. The power which he exerts over them operates through the force of motives and persuasion, and in a manner similar to that by which one man corrupts the principles and undermines the virtue of another. And what reason have we to believe that he acted differently in the present instance? Why may we not suppose that he employed against the human nature of Christ the same artifices which he employs daily against ourselves? Is it incredible that he should suggest to Jesus, pinched with hunger, that he ought no longer to wait, confiding in providence, for the usual appointed means of nourishment, but to exert his miraculous power for creating bread to himself? Is it incredible that he should suggest to Jesus, deliberating anxiously about the best method of executing his commission to the human race, some difficulties concerning the expediency of the gradual humiliating
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plan committed to him by his Father ; and that he should inspire the thought of producing more immediate conviction by descending on his countrymen from the pinnacle of the temple, as from the clouds of heaven, or of extending the benefits of his religion at once to the whole race by appearing in his native dignity as the king and sovereign of the nations? That there is nothing either incredible or improbable in supposing that Satan might labour to insinuate such thoughts into the mind of Jesus, is demonstrated by the fact that these are the very suggestions which he has committed to all his emissaries, since that time, as sources of argument against the wisdom of the plan pursued by Christ for instructing and saving mankind.

The only thing that can occur as an objection to this interpretation arises from the picturesque and dramatic form of the narration. Satan seems to be introduced in person, and to carry on with Jesus a bodily and interesting series of transactions ; whereas, according to the account now given, no visible intercourse took place. But to any man who has attended carefully to the

stile of scripture this objection will carry no force; for nothing is more common than to see there the invisible actions and intercourse of spiritual beings exhibited under the visible form that is familiar to our imagination. What is done in the secret recess of the mind is brought forth to the senses, and clothed in material colours. Even the Almighty God, whose counsels have been from everlasting, *whom no man hath seen*, nor can see, is frequently described as deliberating about the measures he shall adopt, and conversing visibly with his creatures. And Satan himself, in language very similar to what occurs here, is said to have presented himself among the Sons of God, and to have disputed personally with his Maker. In all such cases the language is to be regarded as an accommodation to our mode of conception as men, and is to be interpreted agreeably to the peculiar nature and operations of the beings whom it respects.

From what has been said then, Christians, it appears that it became Jesu to submit to temptations; that the time in which these temptations were likely to assail him in
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their greatest force was in the immediate prospect of his public labours; and that the method in which Satan conducted this attack on his virtue may have been similar to the methods which he employs for the seduction of all mankind. That this is the just view of the case will appear with additional evidence, in the next discourse, from a particular examination of the trials which were on this occasion presented to him.

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SERMON VIII.

The same Subject continued.

MATTHEW, IV, 1—11.

—Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil. 2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. 3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. 4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. 5 Then the Devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world,
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and the glory of them ; 9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. 10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

IN reviewing this passage we have already seen that there is nothing improbable in the general aspect of the circumstances which it presents to us. It was proper on many accounts that the Redeemer and guide of mankind should be tried with temptations : it is natural to suppose that Satan, the great enemy of human virtue, would be the agent in suggesting them : and no time was more likely to be chosen for his attack than the anxious moments when Jesus, about to leave the shade of a private station, was meditating deeply how he might best execute his arduous plan for destroying the kingdom of darkness.

Various unsuccessful attempts have, indeed, been made to explain the particular
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form in which the circumstances of the temptation are here exhibited. On this subject I have already endeavoured to shew that the language employed by the Evangelists does not lead us, necessarily, to believe that these circumstances were different in kind from the circumstances of every temptation that assails us. Satan, like all other spiritual beings, is invisible: his mode of acting is, of course, naturally imperceptible to the bodily eye: and therefore, when his influence on the human heart is to be represented to the imagination of men, he must be brought forth to view, painted as one of themselves, and as accomplishing his end by means similar to those which they employ to influence the conduct of one another. Of this method of representing the actions and influence of spiritual beings, scripture furnishes innumerable examples; and there is no reason why we should exclude the passage before us from being one of the number.

According to this view of the case, then, this passage contains an account of the seductive thoughts which, through the influence of Satan, rose in the mind of Jesus

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on the feeling of his wants, and in the prospect of commencing his public ministry. If this view be just, the form of the temptations will result naturally from the situation in which he now stood ; and they will derive their power from the peculiarity of his present circumstances. Now, when we examine them separately, we find that they are precisely of this description. They were of three different kinds ; and each of them was artfully adapted to the feelings and designs which at that time most powerfully engrossed his attention.

The first temptation presented to him was addressed to the prevailing bodily sensation of the moment. The tempter availed himself of the pressing calls of hunger, and co-operated with them for the purpose of inducing Jesus to pervert, for the supply of his private wants, the miraculous powers committed to him for the attestation of his public commission from heaven. After Jesus had spent forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, in that state of imperfect and scanty nourishment which the scriptures denominate *fasting,*

fasting, he felt the powerful call of hunger ; and as, under the influence of this imperious feeling, he was ruminating on the means of procuring the necessary supply of food, the tempter came to him and said,—that is, the tempter suggested to his thoughts this easy and plausible expedient, *If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* Why shouldst thou continue any longer to submit to fainting and famine ? Thou art indeed in the wilderness far from human aid. But the voice from heaven has declared thee to be the Son of God, and thou art destined to perform an important part in the benevolent plan of providence. In these circumstances it is not proper that thou shouldst want the necessary means of supporting life, and it cannot be the will of heaven that thou shouldst be permitted to perish from hunger before thy great work has been even begun. What though the wilderness be bleak and barren, and the aid of men at a distance ? Thou hast power in thyself, as the Son of God, to convert the wilderness into a fruitful garden, and to summon the angels of heaven
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to minister to thy wants. Exert that power so far at least as may be requisite for removing the cause of thy present uneasiness and danger. Command the stones before thee to become bread, to minister a supply to thy natural appetite, and to preserve a life so important to the best interests of mankind.

Such seem to have been the suggestions which, on this occasion, Satan caused to arise in the mind of Jesus. They were specious, and seemed to propose an easy method of removing his pain and danger without injustice or inconvenience to any one. Our Saviour, however, viewed them in a different light, and rejected them as an attempt to excite within him a criminal distrust of the superintending care of Providence; and as recommending a misapplication of the miraculous powers committed to him for the public purposes of his mission. He answered and said, *man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*:—or, as it might have been translated, by every thing which God is pleased to appoint.

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This reply is borrowed from the book of Deuteronomy, and recals to view the conduct of Providence towards the Israelites in a situation not very unlike to that of Jesus. Conducted into the wilderness by the guidance of heaven, they had been supported in it for the space of forty years, not by the productions of the earth, but by manna, a light aerial food which neither they nor their fathers knew, that they might see, adds the historian, that *man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, or rather, but by every thing which the Lord is pleased to appoint doth man live.*

The application of this passage to the present case was direct, and the argument resulting from it irresistible. God careth for the life of his servants, and he will employ the means of preserving it to the appointed limit, while they continue to follow his direction. If he call them into situations where the ordinary means of support fail; he can, if necessary, employ extraordinary expedients to accomplish the purposes of his goodness. He can even preserve them, without any visible nourishment, from experiencing

periencing the usual decays of nature. But of the necessity of such immediate interpositions, and of the manner of conducting them, he alone is the proper judge. I will not, therefore, says Jesus, distrust the protection of his providence, nor employ unwarrantable means to extricate myself from my present situation. I came into it at his command, and under the direction of his spirit. I know that he will watch over me until the purpose for which he sent me hither be accomplished; and, though I now feel in all their extremity the pinchings of want, I will endure them with patience, in humble trust that in due time he will restore me to the refreshments of food, and to the successful discharge of my public duty.

From the conduct of Jesus on this occasion his followers may learn the important lesson that they ought on no account to use unlawful means for removing the hardships to which their condition is subjected. They are under the care of God. The hardships of their condition are a part of his plan for promoting their improvement

improvement, and while they do their duty, they need not fear that he will suffer them to sink under the difficulties which surround them. If poverty hath come upon you *like an armed man*, or if oppression threatens to overwhelm you, you must neither put forth your hand to steal, nor lift the forbidden sword of assassination and revenge. Perform the duties of the station in which you are placed; commit your cause to God who judgeth righteously, and in peaceful submission to his appointment wait for the time when your redemption shall come. Remember the words of your Saviour; and when Satan or your own hearts tempt you to seek deliverance from your miseries by violating the laws of rectitude, pause with the devotion of a Christian, and say, *It is written, man liveth not by bread alone, but by every thing which God is pleased to appoint.*

The other two temptations respected the method which Jesus should adopt for executing the important office in which he was immediately to engage. As he deliberated on this subject three plans would naturally occur

occur. He might either present the evidence of his divine commission with that direct irresistible conviction which might at once overpower all opposition ; or he might dazzle the eyes of men with the splendour of princely dignity, and preach the new religion to the subjected world from the throne of universal empire ; or lastly, he might follow the slow gradual plan of working out the salvation of the fallen which had been committed to him by the wisdom of his father. This last plan was the most effectual, the most consistent with the appointed principles of human improvement, and absolutely required by the justice of heaven. But it was less flattering, and far more difficult to execute ; and therefore the tempter made a powerful effort to recommend the other plans to his affection and preference.

The first suggestion made to Jesus with this view was a lively representation of the advantage that would result to his cause from descending suddenly on the assembled people from a pinnacle of the temple, and of the safety with which he might make this attempt. * *Then the devil taketh him up
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into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands, they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

This temptation has been commonly explained as an attempt to persuade Christ merely through an unwarantable confidence in the protection of providence, to a deed of desperation which might terminate at once his designs against the kingdom of Satan. But it is capable of a much more probable and appropriate interpretation than the first view of it suggests.

The Jews at this period entertained a strong expectation that their promised Messiah was now about to appear, and under the influence of this expectation they had formed conjectures concerning the manner in which he should come. From a mistaken interpretation of some of the prophecies concerning him they had concluded that he would descend suddenly in visible majesty from the clouds of heaven, and make his first public appearance in the temple

temple of Jerusalem. This visible descent was *the sign from heaven* which they so frequently demanded from him afterwards, and which they regarded as essential to the attestation of his commission.

At this time, therefore, when Jesus was just about to enter on the public discharge of his office, Satan artfully suggested to him the advantage of gratifying in this respect the prejudices of the people, and giving the evidence which they expected. With this view the tempter proposed that he should drop from the summit of the temple as from the clouds, and under the authority of this seal of heaven, call on the astonished multitude instantly to acknowledge his commission. In doing so, adds the crafty deceiver, availing himself of the principle by which Jesus had repelled his former temptation,—in doing so, you can be exposed to no danger; for if you be in reality the appointed Messiah, the angels of heaven, according to your Father's promise will bear you up in their arms, and defend you from injury until you have accomplished the objects of your mission. They will support you on the yielding bosom of
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the air, and, by dropping you unhurt, attest to the wondering crowd the truth of your pretensions.

To this temptation Jesus replies that, though we ought to rely on providence, yet it is not our duty to prescribe to heaven the means of fulfilling its designs, nor to presume upon its protection farther than the established laws of nature authorise. We are to perform the task appointed to us according to the intention of God, dreading no danger which the faithful execution of it may require. But we are not to create dangers to ourselves through a foolish presumption that they will facilitate our purpose, and that the miraculous arm of the Almighty will be stretched out for our defence. For it is written *thou shalt not tempt, or make experiments on, the Lord thy God.*

From this answer of Christ, we ought to learn not only the folly of exposing ourselves rashly to external danger, in the belief that God will protect us as his chosen servants; but also the madness of spiritual presumption, and the danger of relying on the grace of heaven for defence against temptation, and for the blessings of eternal life,
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while we are at no pains to avoid the snare of the destroyer, or to follow the path which conducts to heaven. When God places us in circumstances of temptation, he hath promised that he will not tempt us *above what we are able to bear*, or that *with the temptation he will make a way for our escape*. But he hath no where promised to protect us against the consequences of our own folly, nor to avert the dangers which we chuse to create for ourselves. Nay, he hath declared expressly that *the soul which doeth ought presumptuously shall be cut off from among his people, and that his iniquity shall be upon him*.

Having thus failed in his design of seducing Jesus into evil through the motive of giving more resistless authority to his commission, Satan for a moment suggested to his mind a more flagitious dereliction of his duty. By calling up before him a seductive representation of the glories of temporal dominion, he tempts him to relinquish the path of suffering on which he had entered, and to serve the interests of the devil by prostituting his powers to the pursuit of worldly greatness. *Again the devil taketh*

him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and sayeth unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

It must be remembered that Jesus was now deliberating concerning the part he was to act as the messenger of God to mankind; and that in this deliberation he had to compare the humble persecuted station appointed for him by his father and by duty, with the magnificence and glory of princely dignity. While his thoughts dwelt on this last subject, Satan exhibited to his mind a vivid representation of universal empire, approaching in force to the distinctness of actual vision, and producing the same effect on the passions of the heart. Conscious of his own powers, the Son of God in human form saw by his mind's eye all this glory within his reach by a slight deviation from the path of rectitude; and by employing, like a servant or worshipper of Satan, for his own aggrandisement, the miraculous powers entrusted to him for the salvation of men. The prospect was enchanting; and its charm might to him be
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enhanced through the suggestion of the same malicious spirit, that, by this small sacrifice of duty, he would be able to promote more effectually the happiness of his subjects, and, as king of the nations, to give more rapid spread to the blessings of his gospel.

This delusive thought seems only to have risen before the mind of Jesus, and to have been instantly rejected. He did not hesitate a moment between the path of duty, and the path of error, however speciously disguised. With the indignant tone of insulted virtue he rebukes the tempter and his iniquitous suggestion; *Get thee hence Satan: for it is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Let us, Christians, uniformly follow this firm and manly example. Whenever a competition arises between our duty and our apparent interest, let us instantly decide in favour of conscience. Whatever is inconsistent with her laws is the worship and service of the devil, and has a tendency to increase his power and dominion upon earth. Here therefore we must maintain our allegiance to heaven inviolate. Whatever the strength of the temptation may be, let us

resist and repel it in the words of Jesus, *Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

Such were the temptations presented by Satan to the mind of Christ, and such the means by which Christ preserved himself from their power. Those temptations were drawn from the present circumstances of his state; and they were resisted by those just views of religious truth, which the word of God furnishes for the comfort and direction of the faithful.

This portion of sacred history, taken in connection with other passages of Scripture, not only suggests the method of resisting temptation, but gives us much interesting information concerning the system of the universe. In addition to the agents visible by the bodily eye, it reveals to us a kingdom of spiritual beings over whom Satan presides, who are the enemies of all righteousness, full of subtlety and mischief, and incessantly employed to deceive and corrupt the human race. It furnishes therefore powerful incitements to unwearied vigilance, and demonstrates the necessity of
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using every mean which religion supplies for our defence. *As we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against power, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,* it surely becomes us to *take unto us the whole armour of God that we may be able to stand in the evil day.* And what reason have we for gratitude and confidence when we reflect that impenetrable armour has been provided for us! We know not only that Satan is under the controul of the Almighty, and *bound in chains till the judgment of the great day*; that he acts only by permission from on high; and that his power can be of no effect against us, but through our own consent;—we know also that there is another kingdom of invisible beings who excel in strength—benevolent angels who came and ministered to Jesus in this hour of his trial, who are appointed to be the guardian spirits of the good, who are ready to minister also to us as the heirs of salvation, and who encamp round about all who fear the Lord. We even know that God himself is at the right hand of his servants, pleased with their resistance to

the seductions of iniquity, strengthening them with might from heaven, and preparing for them the triumph of victory. In these circumstances why should we complain of the power and cunning of our adversary? They are counterbalanced by the power and wisdom of our friends; and if we do our own duty, they will serve only to call forth and to improve the virtuous principles of our frame. Greater is he that is with us than all they that be against us. Let us therefore fear him, and we need have no other fear. Let us study his word, let us frequent his ordinances, let us keep our own hearts with all diligence; and the fiery darts of the wicked one will fall harmless at our feet. The example of our master will encourage us in the most difficult paths of duty, and teach us how to overcome.—And may his spirit dwell in us to animate our perseverance, to bring his word seasonably to our remembrance as an antidote against temptation, and finally to conduct us to victory.

SERMON IX.

LUKE, IX, 28—36.

—28 *And it came to pass, about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter, and John, and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. 29 And, as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. 30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: 31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. 32 But Peter, and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. 33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias; not knowing what he said. 34 While he thus spake there came a cloud and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered*
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into the cloud. 35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear ye him. 36 And when the voice was past Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

THE events, recorded in this passage, happened, according to the concurring testimony of the first Christian writers, on Tabor, a beautiful hill in the land of Galilee. It is celebrated in Scripture as the spot where Barak, by the defeat of Sisera, delivered the Israelites from the yoke of Jabin. It was afterwards remarkable for being one of the last places in which the Jews maintained themselves against the Roman power. And in the prosperous days of the gospel it became the seat of several churches, and of a magnificent monastery erected to perpetuate the memory of the transfiguration.

To this delightful spot Jesus retired for the purposes of devotion, and took with him three favoured disciples to be witnesses of the scenes that were to follow. These men were to be afterwards employ-
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ed in propagating the gospel through the world; and it was proper, both on their own account, and on account of those who were to believe through their word, that they should be qualified to attest, from what they had seen, the greatness and divinity of its author. At the same time we perceive here the same care to avoid ostentation which characterised the conduct of Jesus in all the splendid incidents of his life; for none were admitted to see his glory, but those who were necessary to be unexceptionable witnesses of it to the world.

The two celestial visitants, who conversed with Jesus, on this occasion, were regarded by the unanimous consent of the Jews, as the greatest of their Prophets. Moses had been honoured by heaven to be the instrument of their deliverance from a long and cruel bondage, and to be the founder both of their religious and civil constitution. Elias had appeared in times of great degeneracy to rescue that constitution from the multiplied corruptions introduced into it by a succession of wicked princes, and to restore it to its original
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purity. On these accounts they were justly entitled to the gratitude and reverence of their countrymen; and the homage which they paid to Jesus was well fitted to exalt his character in the estimation of the people; and to recommend his doctrines to their acceptance.

The facts which took place in the presence of these heavenly messengers compose by far the most splendid event in the history of Christ. The general course of his life exhibited to the view of his followers nothing but a series of humiliations. As a root springing out of a dry ground he had no form nor comeliness, and when they saw him, there was no beauty in him that they should desire him. Struggling himself with poverty and persecution, he could present no allurements to their ambition or their hope. But on this occasion he shone with a glory more than human, received visible homage from the inhabitants of heaven, and displayed on earth a specimen of his celestial dignity. The minds of the few apostles, who had been admitted to witness the scene, overcome with its magnificence, and thrilled
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with a delicious joy, fainted within them ; and as they awoke from their trance, Peter, not knowing as yet what he said, exclaimed in the fulness of his heart, *O Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

But this gleam of rapture which filled the breasts of the disciples was soon to pass away. Scarcely had Peter wished it to continue when the heavens began to be troubled. Amid the profound serene, a cloud collected, which descending in a pillar of light rested on Moses and Elias, and separated them from the Master whom they came to serve. Borne on the bosom of the cloud, these radiant ministers of heaven rise to their proper abode. But lo ! as they ascend, a voice is heard—Not that awful voice, which from Sinai's top shook the earth and the heavens, and filled the congregation with terror ; but the peaceful voice of approbation and love. It is the voice of the most High which issues from the cloud, and it announces of Jesus, *This is my beloved Son ; hear ye him.* As the voice passed, the magnificent scene vanished ; and the apostles

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bles found themselves alone with Jesus, exposed as before to all the wants and the sorrows of humanity.

It would be vain for us to enquire with what kind of body Moses and Elias appeared, or what was the nature of the change produced on our Saviour's form. Concerning these points, nothing explicit has been revealed; and as every circumstance connected with them is confessedly supernatural, we have no means whatever of information. Our experience extends to nothing that is similar; and therefore, it is in the very nature of things, impossible for us to form any adequate conception on the subject. Instead of pursuing such unprofitable and dangerous speculations, it will become us rather to inquire what purposes the transfiguration was intended to serve in the plan of providence, and what lessons it furnishes for our instruction and comfort. With this view let me observe,

I. That from what happened at the transfiguration we may infer the personal dignity of our Saviour.

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The Jews, in conformity with the predictions of their prophets, expected, that Messiah, when he came, would be cloathed with dignity and power. In the lofty language of eastern poetry, he was to be higher than the kings of the earth, to whom should be given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, who should sit and rule upon his throne for ever and ever, served by all the nations, and worshipped by the angels of heaven. These words, literally interpreted had suggested the notion of a temporal prince, who should establish his throne at Jerusalem, and from that holy place give law to the nations. The whole body of his countrymen were deeply prepossessed with this expectation. Even the disciples, who had been the companions of his affliction, and particularly Peter and the two Sons of Zebedee, looked forward with ambitious hopes to a change of circumstances, and anticipated the time when he should restore the kingdom to Israel, and place them at the head of its administration.

In contradiction, however, to these expectations concerning the Messiah, Jesus appeared in an humble form, and during
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the whole course of his abode on earth, he was to continue a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But that the minds of his disciples might not be totally discouraged by this unexpected state of abasement, he gave them several indications that in him the predictions of the prophets were fulfilled, and that he was in truth higher than the highest of the sons of men. He spake as never man spake ; he did many mighty works which no other man could do ; and on the mount of transfiguration he exhibited a specimen of the glory which he had with the Father, before the world was. His face did shine as the sun ; his raiment became white as snow ; the spirits of departed prophets appeared in his train ministering before him ; and the voice of God proclaimed from the clouds, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

This splendid exhibition was sufficient to preserve in the minds of the apostles a sense of their master's dignity through all the humiliating scenes that succeeded. A ray of light issuing from the holy mount pierced through the cloud of ills that covered him, and shed a glory round the horrors of his cross.

cross. His abasement, even when at its greatest depth, must have appeared in their eyes as the eclipse of majesty—an eclipse which would last only for a while, and from which, like the sun in the heavens, he would soon burst forth again in his native splendor; for, in the language of one of themselves, *they had been eye witnesses of his majesty, and heard him receive from God the Father, honour and glory, when the voice came to him from the excellent glory.*

The history of the transfiguration, Christians, should produce a similar effect on our minds. Though we have not been permitted to witness in person this magnificent display of our Saviour's dignity, it has come down to us attested by sufficient evidence. It forms a part of that sacred record, which the apostles who saw it, have delivered to posterity, confirmed by their sufferings, and sealed by their blood. When, therefore, the sneer of the infidel, or the remains of worldly prejudice threaten to render the humiliation of Jesus a stone of stumbling or a rock of offence, let us turn back our eye from the scene of blood to the mount of vision, and behold our King in his glory. Enlight-
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ened by this view, the sorrows to which he was subjected shall serve only to endear him to our hearts, and to strengthen our attachment to his cause. We shall worship him at the foot of his cross; and, even when he seems to sink beneath the malice of his oppressors, we shall look up to him as the Lord of heaven, whom principalities and powers obey, and with confidence commit ourselves, and all our interests to his affectionate protection.

II. We learn from what happened at the transfiguration that this glorious Prince was appointed by God to suffer and to die. The great subject of the conversation between him and the two ancient prophets respected the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

One of the immediate ends of this visit from heaven, probably, was to fortify and prepare the mind both of Jesus himself, and of the disciples for the approaching event of his crucifixion. On other great occasions in his history, we meet with incidents, which, in this respect, bear some resemblance to the event before us. In two try-
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ing scenes of his life, after his temptation in the wilderness, and in the hour of his inward agony, we find messengers sent from on high to strengthen him: and several circumstances lead us to presume that the visit made to him on the mount of transfiguration had partly the same object. It was made at the commencement of his awful conflict with the powers of darkness, and when he was meditating to leave for the last time his retirement in Galilee, and to meet his fate.

While the transfiguration animated Jesus himself to encounter with fortitude the dangers before him, it contributed also to prepare the minds of his followers for what was to befall him. The conversation which they heard on the mount opened to them a new view of their Master's destiny, and forwarned them, by an authority which they could not reject, that the intimations given by himself concerning his disastrous fate were consonant to the intentions of heaven, and would most certainly be realised.

The language of the ancient prophets, though ambiguous in some respects, might have led an enlightened reader to anticipate

the sufferings of the Messiah. These sufferings were notified in the first prediction after the fall, when it was said that the serpent should bruise the heel of the woman's seed ; they were typified by various symbolical actions in the ritual of the Jewish worship : and the very manner of their termination was intimated by the death of the paschal lamb, and by the declarations that Messiah the Prince should be cut off ; *that the assembly of the ungodly should pierce his hands and feet ; that he should be stricken for the transgression of his people, and that he should make his grave with the wicked.*

But whatever darkness might rest on the predictions of ancient prophecy when considered by themselves, who could doubt their meaning after the conversation which the apostles heard on the mount ? Moses and Elias, the two greatest of the prophets, even when proclaiming the dignity of Jesus, spake of the decease which he was about to accomplish, withdrew the veil from before the types and shadows of former times, and pointed out the place and the manner of his departure,

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What were the causes which made it necessary that the Son of man should die; and in what manner his death contributes to satisfy the justice of heaven, we cannot fully explain. But we know that it was predetermined in the counsels of the Almighty; that a long series of preparations was made for its accomplishment; that the spirits of departed prophets appeared on earth to announce its approach; that it is analogous to the procedure of providence in other cases; and that in virtue of it, the gate of immortality is opened to the penitent. Rejoice therefore, O Christian, even in thy Master's cross. His death was not the effect of accident, nor of the resistless power of his enemies. It was the appointment of God for the redemption of the fallen. It was a theme of congratulation to the spirits of the just, who left their bright abodes to hail the period of its accomplishment. It is still the subject of their song: and from the holy mount they call on us to look beyond its apparent infamy, to trace it to its origin in the heavens, and to glory in the victory which it purchased.

III. We learn from what happened on the mount of transfiguration, that the Jewish institutions were henceforth to cease, that Jesus was appointed the universal teacher of mankind, and that therefore the gospel is now the only revelation which can claim our belief and submission as an authentic declaration of the will of heaven.

The Jewish institutions were no doubt of divine appointment, and were entitled, for a time, to the reverence and submission of the people to whom they were given. But many considerations concur to prove that these institutions were originally designed to be limited in their extent, and transient in their duration. They were carnal ordinances, accommodated to the infancy of human improvement, and they pointed evidently to a more perfect state of things which should supersede their obligation. The time fixed for their abolition was now come; and Moses the giver of the Levitical ordinances, and Elias their great restorer, appear together on the mount, paying homage to Jesus, surrendering to him their authority, and pointing him out

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as the end of the law for righteousness to them who believe. After this solemn transaction, these holy men were withdrawn from the earth; and, from the cloud which bore them aloft, the voice of the most High was heard proclaiming the arrival of a new Prophet to occupy their place, and commanding obedience to him. That voice announced of Jesus, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, bear ye him; and thus was fulfilled the prediction of Moses, The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him shall ye hearken.*

Considered in this view the transfiguration may be regarded as the solemn inauguration of Jesus to the honours of his spiritual kingdom. From that moment he became the public head of his church; the authorised teacher of the nations; and it was the duty of mankind to listen to him with reverence, and to obey. The new order of things had commenced: The Prophet promised by God to the fathers had arisen: the law with its types and oblations had retired for ever: and the gospel

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appeared sent down from heaven to enlighten and to bless the nations. Let us therefore, Christians, yield to the guidance of this spiritual Prince, and let us henceforth honour him even as we honour the Father. To him is committed all power in heaven, and earth, and that power is given to him to be exerted for us. Let us therefore receive with gratitude the doctrines which he teaches, and practise with diligence the duties which he requires. Thus shall we act the part which becomes us as his disciples upon earth; and when the hour of our departure comes, we shall rise on the clouds of heaven to appear in glory with Moses and Elias, and to enjoy for ever the approbation of our God. For we learn from the circumstances of the transfiguration

IV. That the soul of a good man survives the dissolution of the body, and becomes capable of higher measures of perfection and happiness.

The hope of immortality has been common to all the nations of the earth. It is encouraged by the instincts of nature,
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and supported by the deductions of reason. At the same time we must observe, that the hope which rests on these foundations is feeble and unsteady. Futurity is covered with a thick veil, through which the eye of mortals can scarcely penetrate. So dim indeed is our natural prospect into the country beyond the grave, that we are unable to distinguish the condition and employment of its inhabitants. We are even perplexed, at times, with the discouraging thought that the scene which we paint to ourselves may be nothing but a vision, which exists only in the delusions of fancy, and which the hand of death will dissipate for ever.

The gospel, however, has lifted up the veil which covered futurity from mortal eyes, and given us a clearer view of the land of spirits. It has given us complete assurance that this land has a real existence; that the condition of its inhabitants will be determined by the nature of their conduct in the present probationary state; that, if they have been good, they shall be raised to a pure, and glorious, and delightful society; that their employments shall be the most honourable and improving; and that
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their happiness shall be without interruption, and without end.

This information the gospel conveys to us both by explicit declarations and by symbolical representation. And besides these methods of instruction, the three apostles on the mount of transfiguration received a transient, but direct view of the celestial glory. They were introduced to the spirits of departed saints; witnessed the perfection to which these spirits were now exalted; and felt, in the influence of the scene around them, a passing foretaste of the happiness of heaven. Their feeble frame was overpowered by the rapturous emotions which it produced; and in an ecstasy of joy they exclaimed, *it is good for us to be here.*

From what happened on this occasion, we may infer not only that the separated spirits of good men live and act, and enjoy happiness, but that they take some interest in the business of this world, and even that their interest in it has a connection with the pursuits and habits of their former life. The virtuous cares which occupied them on earth follow them into their new abode.

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Moses and Elias had spent the days of their temporal pilgrimage in promoting among their brethren the knowledge and the worship of the true God. They are still attentive to the same great object ; and, enraptured at the prospect of its advancement, they descend on this occasion to animate the labours of Jesus, and to prepare him for his victory over the powers of hell.

What a delightful subject of contemplation does this reflection open to the pious and benevolent mind ! what a spring does it give to all the better energies of the heart ! Your labours of love, my virtuous brethren, your plans of beneficence, your swellings of satisfaction in the rising reputation of those whose virtues you have cherished, will not, we have reason to hope, be terminated by the stroke of death. No ! your spirits will still linger around the objects of their former attachment. They will behold with rapture even the distant effects of those beneficent institutions which they once delighted to rear ; they will watch with a pious satisfaction over the growing prosperity of the country which they loved ;
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with a parent's fondness, and a parent's exultation, they will share in the fame of their virtuous posterity; and, by the permission of God, they may descend at times as guardian angels, to shield them from danger, and to conduct them to glory.

Of all the thoughts that can enter the human mind, this is one of the most animating and consolatory. It scatters flowers around the bed of death. It enables us who are left behind, to support with firmness the departure of our best beloved friends; because it teaches us that they are not lost to us for ever. They are still our friends. Though they be now gone to another apartment in our Father's house, they have carried with them the remembrance and the feeling of their former attachments. Though invisible to us, they bend from their dwelling on high to cheer us in our pilgrimage of duty, to rejoice with us in our prosperity, and, in the hour of virtuous exertion, to shed through our souls the blessedness of heaven.

Considered in this view, what a fund of encouragement did the vision on the holy mount provide for the 'apostles during all the
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the labours of their future ministry ! While it gave them a foretaste of the reward promised to persevering fidelity in the cause of goodness, it taught them that they were not called to labour in this cause unsupported and unseen ; that a cloud of innumerable witnesses, even all the prophets and saints of former times were the anxious spectators of their conduct ; that the glorified spirit of their Master accompanied them to the conflict of obedience, deeply interested in the event ; and that in due time he would acknowledge them with exultation as his friends before the angels of God.

Let the same considerations, Christians, encourage our obedience. In the hour of trial when our virtue is ready to sink under the power of temptation, let us look back to the holy mount, and receive from it a faint vision of the glory which yet remains to be revealed, and compared with which, the glories of this earth are as nothing and very vanity. The vision will reanimate our courage, dissolve the deceitful charm of temptation, and prompt us to endure as seeing him who is invisible. It will teach us to look forward from our present struggle to the

the blessed period when our Redeemer shall change our vile bodies, and, fashioning them like his glorious body, shall admit us, not for a few passing moments, but for ever to dwell with Moses and Elias in the society of the just, and to share in their happiness.

Such, my brethren, are some of the reflexions which the scene of the transfiguration was fitted to suggest to the apostles. It gave them a transient view of their Master's glory: it taught them that his afflictions were not the effect of accident, but part of a great beneficent plan of mercy, and predetermined by the counsels of heaven: it prepared them for listening with reverence and submission to the doctrines which he delivered; and it placed before them an animating prospect of the happiness and perfection of the world to come. Let the recollection of this event, Christians, continue to suggest the same improving lessons to our minds. Let it increase our reverence for the exalted character of Jesus: let it warm our hearts with gratitude for the voluntary offering which he made for our redemption; and let it per-

suade us to listen to the voice with which he calls us to virtue, and to glory. We are yet at a distance from our native home ; and have still to struggle with the difficulties of our journey. But if we follow his direction ; if we cultivate his temper and obey his law, he will protect us amid the trials of obedience ; he will visit our departing souls with the consolations of his love ; and when he comes again in the clouds of heaven, attended by the spirits of the just, he will shed around us the joys of heaven, and receive us into the everlasting habitation of his Father. Amen.

SERMON X.

PSALM, cxix, 96.

—*Thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

MANY causes contribute to prevent men from attaining moral perfection. Some of these causes arise from defects of the will itself, and its aversion to the rule of duty; and others from defects in our judgments respecting the nature and extent of our obligations. These last are, perhaps, both the most numerous, and the most incurable; for they derive their force from a corruption of the principles which should enlighten and guide us; and *if the light within us be itself darkness, how great must be that darkness!*

One of the most important mistakes in our moral judgments respects the standard
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of duty. We form to ourselves an imperfect model of excellence—we propose a defective aim, and regulating our efforts by it, we fail, even when we think we have done God good service, to reach the end of our creation. After we have executed all that we proposed; though *we may think we have attained and are already perfect*, we are still the servants of iniquity. Our hearts are the seat of evil passions, and our conduct, though fair and specious when viewed partially and from a distance, is very unequal in its texture, and unfit to bear the inspection of our Judge.

It is therefore of indispensable necessity that they who devote themselves to the service of righteousness form a correct standard of moral estimation; that they be careful not to narrow too much the sphere of their duties; and that they guard against the numerous illusions which on this point are so apt to mislead and betray them. The commandment of the Lord is exceeding broad, reaching through the thoughts and intents of the heart to all the modes of expressing them, and controlling our conduct in every condition

and period of our lives. It will be a profitable employment to direct our attention to this extent of the divine law, and to ascertain the conditions that are necessary to render our actions conformable to it.

I. The commandment of God extends to the internal principles from which our actions proceed.

Actions in themselves, and separated from the motives which prompt them, have no moral quality whatever. They are natural effects of springs that operate within us, and follow these springs as necessarily as any other effect follows its cause. In themselves therefore they can be objects of neither praise nor blame. These attributes belong to them only in consequence of their connection with certain inward principles of choice; and hence, to the conviction of all mankind, the same outward action may be either good or bad according to the quality of the principle which produced it.

The observation that has now been made respecting external actions, is in a
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great measure true also respecting even the dispositions and habits of the mind. These are, in many cases, blind impulses, which in themselves are neither good nor bad. They receive a moral character only from the illuminating principle by which they are formed and directed. Virtue and vice are qualities of intelligent beings alone, and must therefore derive their origin from those intellectual powers of reason and conscience by which such beings are distinguished.

From these observations it follows that the commandment of God for regulating our moral conduct must reach beyond our actions and dispositions, to the principles of choice by which such actions and dispositions have been formed. These principles it takes under its control, purifying them from every improper influence, and requiring that in all cases the choice which they make be conformable to the divine will, as announced to us by the voice of conscience and the law from heaven. It is this sacred regard to the divine will—this inward conviction of duty which constitutes the essence of moral obligation, and which is therefore necessary to give to our actions dignity and

value. Hence, in conformity with this doctrine, the scriptures invariably represent the heart as the seat of right and wrong, as containing *the good treasure out of which a good man bringeth forth that which is good, or the evil treasure out of which an evil man bringeth forth that which is evil.* They command us *to keep the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life;* they teach us that the heart is the object to which, in judging of our character, God will look; and they declare that its most hidden springs are subject to the control of his law: *for the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

In estimating the moral worth of our conduct, therefore, we should not only see that the matter of our actions be right and conformable to rule: we must also take into account, as the chief circumstance, the living principle from which they flow. Unless we feel that they have proceeded either from an immediate sense of obligation,

tion, or at least from habitual dispositions formed originally on principles of duty, we can have no confidence in their value. Without this requisite they may perhaps be useful to the world, and conducive to our private comfort; but they cannot be morally good, nor commensurate with the commandment of God.

Yet how seldom do men think of looking so deep for a support to their self approbation! How easily are they satisfied if there be nothing in their external conduct which the world can blame! How readily do they conclude from a few splendid acts of outward obedience that they are the friends of virtue and of God, though in performing them God and virtue were not in all their thoughts. This is a source of error that easily besets us; and there is scarcely a branch of duty in which it does not lead us to narrow the commandment of God, and to mistake the shadow of virtue for its reality. We perform from private motives the actions which virtue demands, and without farther inquiry, we trust in ourselves that we are righteous.—

Here, for instance, is a man of most exem-

plary industry, distinguished by sobriety, by strict fidelity to his engagements, by regular attention to business, and by all the prudential habits of mercantile life,—his whole outward conduct is fair and unimpeachable; —but the whole of it is determined, not by maxims of duty, not by a resolution to glorify his Maker through the exercise and improvement of his talents; but by the desire of raising a fortune, and of transmitting with his name an estate to his posterity. *There* is another, temperate in the midst of jovial companions, and abstemious though surrounded with all the luxuries of the east. So far he does well; but he has no title to consider his temperance as a virtue; for his sole motive to it arises from the weakness of an exhausted constitution, or from the love of health and of the satisfactions which accompany it. *Yonder* is a third with a still higher opinion of his own merit, and with stronger claims to our approbation and favour. He seems born for the relief of the wretched; in every street, he begs for the widow and the orphan, and bestows his own goods most liberally to feed the poor. And yet there may be little

tle genuine heart-felt charity in all these seeming labours of love. I charge him not with the vices of ostentation and vanity; for even in the absence of these vices, his beneficence may flow from springs that have no virtue. Having received from nature a melting softness of temper, he may be unable to resist the importunate demands that are made on him: feeling a nervous sympathetic uneasiness at the sight of distress, he may hasten to remove his own pain by relieving the miserable objects from which it comes: or animated by a busy bustling spirit that must have employment, he loves to run with the crowd; and while charity is the fashion, he is an active and useful patron of all the schemes devised to promote it. Through these channels he is the author of much good to his brethren, and has a just title to their gratitude and applause. But, before God and at the bar of conscience, all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags. His beneficence is not the virtue of charity, because it proceeds not from views of duty, nor from a rational love to his kind. It is the offspring of his blood and tempera-

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ment ; the mere effect of his natural constitution, like hunger and thirst ; and can be no just ground to him of self applause. For though from these motives he should bestow all his goods to feed the poor, and give his body to be burned, he has not charity, and it will profit him nothing.

From these reasonings it is evident that the commandment of God reaches beyond outward acts, and that our conduct, however specious in appearance, or however useful in its effects, will not be approved by him as good, unless it proceed from right principles. It becomes us therefore to purify our hearts as well as our hands, to practise truth in the inward part, and to pray that God would sanctify us wholly in spirit and soul and body to do his will.

II. The commandment of God extends to all the branches of our conduct, enjoining the practice of every virtue, and forbidding iniquity under all its forms. It not only rectifies the springs of action ; but it follows them into all their channels, and carries with it a purifying influence wherever it goes.

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Viewed in this light the rule of our duty is exceeding broad, and applies itself to every relation in which we can be placed. There is no part nor circumstance of our conduct which it does not embrace and regulate. It governs us in the ordinary business of the world, as well as in the more solemn acts of obedience, and commands us to *continue in all things written in the book of the law to do them.*

In scripture, indeed, as well as in other books of morality, the rule of duty is exhibited in a few general precepts, which may be surveyed in an instant, and which, on this account, may not seem, at first sight, to be very extensive. But these precepts are fertile in consequences. In themselves they are all equally of indispensable obligation; and each of them is like a prolific trunk bearing innumerable branches, through all of which the same quality of obligation is diffused. The law which prohibits any vice, prohibits that vice through all its forms and sources; and the law which commands any duty, commands all the applications of which it is susceptible, with every thing that can promote the per-
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formance of it. Does the law, for instance say, *Thou shalt not steal*, and does it not thereby prohibit every kind of injustice—every act by which you may promote your own interest at the expence of your neighbour's? The same reason which renders it criminal to convert his property clandestinely to the supply of your wants, renders it criminal to seize it by violence, to cheat him out of it by fraudulent transactions, to withhold from him unreasonably the means by which he might increase it, to disappoint the expectations which you have led him to form, to keep back the due rewards of his service, or in any way to prevent him from enjoying, in their full advantage, all the opportunities of success which providence has given him. In like manner has the law said, *Honour thy father and mother*, and has it not by these words commanded you to love them, to yield due obedience to their authority, to listen to their instructions and advice, to promote their comfort to the utmost of your ability, to provide for their wants, to bear even with their infirmities, to soothe them in their decline, and by every affectionate mean in your power

to render the evening of their day peaceful and serene? Nay, does not the same law with proportionable force bind on your conscience the duties which you owe to all who, like parents, have acquired, by their station or their benefits, a claim to your reverence and attachment—to the master whom you serve—to the teacher who forms your mind to virtue—to the magistrate who gives you protection, and acts, as the ordinance of God, for your good?—By adopting this mode of interpreting the general precepts of morality, and pursuing each of them in its course, you will find it to be of most extensive application; especially when you reflect that it includes under it not only the external act, but the desire from which the act proceeds, and the very thoughts and habits and occasions by which this desire is generated. The same law which saith *thou shalt not steal* hath also said *thou shalt not covet*, prohibiting thereby every movement of the heart towards injustice, and every unnecessary approach to the temptations which have a tendency to excite it.

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This broad view of the divine law should be permitted to recur frequently to our minds, because through the deceitfulness of sin we are extremely apt to forget it. We feel a disposition within us to divide the demands of duty, and to admit those only which accord with our inclination. Hence you may see one man devoted to exercises of piety, and attentive to its minutest forms, while in the ordinary intercourse of life, he seems to have scarcely any sense of what he owes to the reputation, to the comfort or even to the property of the neighbour with whom he lives. You may see another who discharges with great fidelity the social duties required of him as the member of a family, of a neighbourhood and of a state; but who never reflects that he is a creature of God, destined for immortality, and bound to feel, and to pay to his Creator, the homage of gratitude and obedience. You may see a third under the name of reformation continually altering his pursuit as he advances in life, but never growing better; because he only changes his passions, and while he renounces the follies of youth, he substitutes in their room only the more

incorrigible sins of manhood and old age. You will find another still anxious for the outward propriety of his demeanour, and tenderly alive to the slightest appearances of indecorum, while he has no scruple in secret to open his imagination to every suggestion of the tempter, and to devour inwardly the coarsest husks of iniquity. And you will find a counterpart to him in the man of refined and delicate but ineffective emotion, who thinks himself, like the daughter of Tyre, all glorious within; but whose religion and morality are never seen beyond the circle of his feelings and his talk.—All these errors spring from attempts to contract the field of duty, and are most dangerous in their tendency. They deaden and corrupt the conscience. At the same time, they are altogether without excuse; for the vices which spring from them are obvious violations of duty. They are not sins of infirmity and surprise, but habitual offences; and it will be vain to flatter ourselves that they may be compensated by the performance of other duties which we have little temptation to neglect. The law of God knows of no such commutation. It was
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given to regulate and controul the whole of our inclinations, and not to foster their evasions and corruptions: it is of no private interpretation: and his word solemnly declares that though *we keep the whole law and yet offend habitually and wilfully in one point, we are guilty of all.*

III. The commandment of God extends to every instant of our lives.—It requires not only that our principles of action be right, and that they diffuse their purifying influence to every branch of our conduct; it requires also that this influence be permanent, and ready at all times to guide us in the path of obedience.

The truth of this proposition appears from the very nature of moral obligation. The general laws of rectitude have no dependence on time. The reason which binds us to be just and pious and temperate now, has the same intrinsic force at every other instant, and must control our actions through the whole period of our being. The principle of duty in the moral world, like the principle of life in the natural, can never become extinct without destruc-

destruction to the system which it animates. If virtue be the essential good of man, it must be good for him at all times and in all places, and no accidental circumstance of situation can possibly dissolve his obligation to pursue it. It is his duty, therefore, never to weary in well doing, never to relax in his obedience, and to walk uprightly all his life long.

Accordingly the scriptures uniformly declare that temporary acts of virtue, and transient glowings of devotion will not fit us for the kingdom of God. They compare the *godly man to a tree planted by the rivers of water whose leaf never faileth*: They promise salvation *to him only who endureth unto the end*: and, in awful language, they forewarn us that *if even the righteous turneth away from his righteousness and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to the abominations of the wicked, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.*

From these declarations we are not indeed to infer that casual offences, or transient overflowings of passion, springing from

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surprise, and instantly deplored, will cut off a good man from the hope of heaven. For trembling penitents, whom temporary bursts of passion have misled for a moment, the grace of the gospel provides strong consolation. But the language of scripture compels us to admit that the law of God is of eternal obligation; that our attachment to it must be habitual and persevering; and that it is a dangerous delusion to suppose, as too many professing Christians seem to do, that because we have been serious and strict and sanctimonious for a season, we may afterwards, on the return of temptation, give ourselves up with safety to the pleasures of sin. The very supposition is a proof that our zeal for God, even while it lasted, was not according to knowledge, and that we had not apprehended aright the extent of his commandment. What? Is it possible for us to believe that *having begun in the spirit we shall* be made perfect through the flesh? Or that a temporary success in the warfare of virtue will justify our future desertion to the standard of its enemies? *Can there be such concord between God and Belial, or such communion between*
right

light and darkness? Let us remember the words of the apostle, *if after we have escaped the pollution of the world, we be again entangled therewith, and overcome, the latter end is worse with us than the beginning; for if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.*

From what has been said, christians, we may be convinced, that the commandment of God is exceeding broad. It reaches inward to the principles and springs of the heart; it extends on every side to all the relations in which we can be placed; and it stretches forward through every future period of our being. It demands that in all situations, and at all times, our thoughts and words and actions be directed by a steady regard to the divine law, and by a sense of the obligations which it imposes. To obey it in all its demands is the glory and perfection of our nature.—But who, O God, is sufficient for these things? Thou knowest our frame and rememberest we are dust. Leave us not we beseech thee to ourselves,
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nor to the might of our own arm ; for then in the day of trial, the spirits would fail before thee, and the souls which thou hast made. Send us help from thy sanctuary, and strengthen us out of Zion, that we may stand perfect and complete in the will of God, and be thoroughly furnished in every good work. And glory shall be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost ; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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SERMON XI.

MATTHEW, xi, 30.

—*My yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

BY the yoke of Jesus is meant the law of obedience which he has imposed on his followers. The phrase alludes to the ancient custom of employing a yoke as the emblem of subjection; and it intimates to the disciples of Christ that they are no longer at liberty to live as they list, but bound to observe the rules of service which their master has prescribed to them.

To corrupted minds this service has always appeared hard and intolerable; because it imposes a restraint upon their passions. Even the man of genuine piety, when he contemplates the extent of the di-

vine law, and compares his own weakness with the height of perfection to which he is commanded to aspire, has sometimes felt his heart beginning to fail him; and has been heard to say in the tone of despondency “*Who, O God, is sufficient for these things!*” Dwelling on the difficulties of the service, he magnifies them in thought, till his courage sinks within him, and leaves him the helpless victim of his own fears. But his fears are extravagant, and without just foundation. An apostle has told him that “*the commandments of God are not grievous;*” and our Saviour himself, in the most gracious terms, has declared that his yoke is easy and his burden light.

After explaining this declaration, chiefly for the purpose of guarding you against a misconception of its meaning, I shall point out a few reasons on which your belief of this comfortable doctrine may rest.

Let me begin then by observing that those who take upon them the yoke of Jesus, devote themselves to a life of righteousness. The discharge of duty is no longer to them an optional or occasional task. They are by profession the servants of him
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whose yoke they bear. To please him and to promote his cause are the great objects which they have become bound to pursue. Like other men they will engage indeed in the cares and employments of the world; but these cares and employments they will not view as ends on which their regards are ultimately to rest, but as means appointed by their master for the exercise and discipline of their graces. While therefore they desire success in the management of their temporal concerns, and while they labour strenuously to secure it; they will still hold that success as subordinate to the faithful discharge of their duty, and be uniformly more desirous that *whether they eat or drink, or whatsoever they do, they may do all to the glory of God.*

This service the text declares to be easy. But from this declaration you must not rashly infer that a course of virtuous obedience will cost the Christian no exertion. Under the government of the Almighty a continued and vigorous exertion of the talents committed to us is indispensibly requisite both to our improvement and our happiness. The mind of man is so consti-

tuted that it cannot remain at rest. Its enjoyment springs from action : and if sources of excitement and activity be not furnished to it from without, it will create them for itself. It delights in the exercise of its faculties ; it beholds with pleasure the obstacles from which this exercise is to arise ; and it receives its noblest and most sublime satisfaction from looking back on the difficulties which it has met and conquered. It is only when these difficulties are disproportioned to its powers—when they oppress and overwhelm it—that they become causes of dejection and distress.

We must therefore expect that the service of Christ will require from us the exertions which are suited to the principles of our active nature. Easy as it may be, it is still a yoke, the pressure of which must be felt. It places before us a lofty aim to which we must rise through much labour and exertion, and through many dangers of being disappointed. How many headstrong passions have we to control ! how many powerful temptations to resist ! how many sublime virtues to form and practise before we can be qualified for the kingdom of the
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just ! In this service therefore, even in its easiest form, we shall be called to encounter difficulties ; we shall need to watch and pray without ceasing ; and we shall often have occasion to *fear lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, we should seem to come short of it.*

The degree of exertion and vigilance to which I have now alluded must be given by every man who aspires after Christian perfection. But there are cases where much higher degrees of it will be requisite. When the best of our days have been lost in folly, and habit has rendered the love of sin a kind of second nature to us—when the practices of our companions, and the customs of the age in which we live, have been so loose as to corrupt the sources of our moral judgments, and to taint the very atmosphere which our souls breathe—when wickedness sits high in place, and waves the sword of discouragement and persecution against all who will live godly in Christ Jesus—in circumstances like these, the service of Jesus becomes a hard and perilous warfare, where many painful sacrifices must be made, and where we must *take unto us*
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the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.

Why then, it may be asked, does Christ call his yoke easy and his burden light? —He speaks of them comparatively. His yoke is easy in comparison with all the yokes which in the pursuit of happiness, men have imposed upon themselves. It is light when placed in the balance against the heavy burden of superstitious ceremonies under which both Jews and Gentiles groaned; and it is far more easily borne than the shameful degrading slavery of vice. It requires, indeed, that we be sincerely ambitious of moral excellence, and that the attainment of this excellence be the great and serious business of our lives. It leaves still on our way to perfection obstacles sufficient to rouse and animate our exertion. But these obstacles are not insurmountable; and when we compare them with the means of success which Christ has provided for us, they cease even to be formidable.

In proof of this observation let us now proceed to consider some of the circumstances which contribute to render the service

vice of Jesus easy to the man who sincerely pants after perfection. Consider then,

I. That all the duties which this service imposes are reasonable in themselves and conducive to our advantage.

The law of christian obedience is holy, just and good. It flows from an authority which to us must ever be supreme, the authority of God our Creator and Preserver, on whom we continually depend, and from whose jurisdiction nothing—not even the insensibility of the grave can withdraw us. It has a direct tendency to restore the rectitude of our moral constitution, by re-establishing due subordination and harmony among the powers of the soul. And the course of action which it prescribes generally leads, by the appointment of providence, to the greatest respectability and happiness competent to our condition in life. In obeying this law, therefore, we are supported by the approbation of our reason, and by all the natural powers which a wise man would chuse to consult in the direction of his conduct. We are not discouraged by secret misgivings from
within :

within : we feel no enervating influence from the fear of future consequences : our arm is not palsied by the deadening reproaches of a guilty conscience. Obstacles indeed may appear before us ; but we know that it is both our duty and our interest to overcome them. Under this consideration we proceed to meet them with steady resolution ; and we find in that resolution, and in the inward satisfaction which accompanies it both a mean and a pledge of victory.

But besides the facility for discharging duty which arises from this source, consider,

II. That all the parts of the Christian service are so consistent, and so intimately connected together, that they give each other mutual support, and that we cannot make a single step in the road to heaven which does not prepare and facilitate the next.

In the service of iniquity the sinner has many masters to obey. His passions, with imperious voice, issue contradictory commands, and the unhappy drudge is driven
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hither and thither, uncertain what he is to do. He cannot serve the one without mortifying and offending the other; and hence he spends his wretched days in the vain and toilsome effort to reconcile contradictions. Even in the service of our fellow men the same intolerable yoke of contrarities is too often felt. Men alter their plans; they change their opinions; and the arrangements of this day are upset or rendered impracticable by the arrangements of to-morrow. But in the service of your divine Master, christians, none of these vexing discouragements can possibly occur. He is himself the same, yesterday, to day, and for ever; all his commands point to one object, the restoration of your moral perfection: and the execution of any one of them facilitates the execution of all the rest. Who ever cherished in his heart the love of God, and did not at the same instant feel within him a warmer glow of benevolence to men? Who ever rose from the conquest of one passion without feeling himself strengthened for a more successful conflict with every other? Who ever did a generous deed, honourable to himself, and
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perfective of his nature, without experiencing for the moment a nobler sense of the dignity of man, and a stronger ambition to act worthy of it? In a word, all the virtues are linked together by innumerable ties: they all impart vigour to each other, and to the whole of our moral constitution; and they conspire harmoniously to improve and exalt the character of him by whom they are practised.

These two considerations relative to the reasonableness of the Christian service, and the mutual connection and subservience of all its parts, prove that the yoke of Christ, viewed by itself, and abstracted from our feebleness, must of necessity be light.— But it may be said, though it be light in itself, it is too weighty for us, enfeebled, as we are by the fall, and by long continued habits of corruption. To obviate this objection, consider

III. The strength that has been given you for discharging the duties of your Christian service.

To suppose that Christ invites you to engage in a service which ye have not power
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to perform, and that he will punish you for the want of attainments which ye have no means of reaching, would be to derogate from his character. It would be imputing to him the injustice of the Egyptian taskmasters, and calling him, in the language of the wicked and slothful servant, *a hard man who reaps where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not strawed.*

In what manner, at what time, and through what channels the requisite strength is imparted to the servant of Jesus, are questions which have often exercised the understandings, and divided the opinions of speculative men. But the solution of them has little or no influence on practice, and may therefore be safely left to *the scribes and disputers of this world.* The only question of practical value, and therefore the only question in which we have much concern, relates to the degree of power which we possess for discharging our duty. And on this point all parties are agreed that the sincere servant of Jesus is thoroughly furnished to every good work, and that he can do all things through Christ strengthening him.

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That this degree of power is actually possessed by the followers of Christ you have innumerable proofs. To be convinced of it look only at the facts before you. Behold the good who, in past times, or at the present day, have kept the faith and maintained their integrity. They are a great multitude whom no man can number; they come out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue; they were once men, feeble and corrupted like you; and from the summit of perfection on which they now stand, they are witnesses for God, that he has not imposed on us an impracticable task. Recollect the instances in which, moved by some prevailing motive, you have yourselves resisted strong temptation, and you will be satisfied that, in the other instances in which you fell before it, your fall was less owing to want of power than to want of inclination to perform your duty. In fine, look up to heaven, and behold the omnipotent spirit of God descending from his throne, and ready, at your request, to interpose for your support *Ask, says your Master himself, Ask and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall*

shall be opened unto you. For if ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him ? Aided by this omnipotent ally, what reason can you have to complain of weakness, or to shrink in despair from the combat that awaits you ? He knows your frame, and he *will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

But you may perhaps reply, the yoke of Christ is burdensome, not because it is heavy in itself, nor because we want power to bear it ; but because we have little affection for the service. It is a weariness to us, and we languish under the continual and irksome pressure which it gives. This, I am afraid is the source of the evil. We are unwilling to resist the seductions of sin, and therefore iniquity has dominion over us. But then, you must observe that this evil springs from ourselves and from our own fault, not from any thing oppressive in the nature of our duty. To remove,
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however, even this cause of complaint, consider

IV. The numerous motives which recommend the service of Jesus to our choice, and contribute to render his law our delight.

The master whose yoke we have taken up, is our best and most affectionate friend, who knows well our true interests, and who has given the most substantial proofs of his zeal to promote them. You have only to recal to your remembrance, the sorrows of his life spent in doing good, the agonies of crucifixion voluntarily endured for the sins of mankind, the triumphs of his soul when he saw his work of redemption finished, and pardon purchased for you—you have only to view these facts to be convinced that the service he requires of you must be intended for your advantage. I speak not of the gratitude which you owe to him, nor of the love which is due to his character; though gratitude and love have often sustained far heavier burdens than that which he imposes on you. I speak not even of the respect which you
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are bound to pay him as the vicegerent of God and Prince of the moral world; though these obligations should be more sacred in your eye than any earthly consideration. I speak only of your true interest, and call on you to bear with cheerfulness the yoke of Christ from an enlightened regard to your present and future happiness. The conduct to which it leads is perfective of your nature, and furnishes to you an infallible defence against whatever can occasion shame or just reproach. It lays the only solid foundation for peace of mind, for lasting honour among men, for the blessing and protection of God. It will smooth to you the bed of sickness, disarm death of his terrors, and open for you at last an admission into the everlasting habitation of the blessed. For that same Jesus who is your master now sits on his Father's throne, preparing mansions of glory for his servants; and when he shall come again, his reward will be with him, *to give to every man according as his work shall be.*

It is obvious therefore that the service of Christ is the road to true happiness and

glory. Instead of being a burden to us, it ought to be the joy and rejoicing of our heart. Yes, O blessed Jesus, thy commands, as well as thy sufferings, are proofs of affection to our race. They conduct us to the true end of our being; and therefore it becomes us thankfully to accept thy proffered guidance, and to serve thee with willingness of mind, in holiness and righteousness before thee all the days of our life.

From all these reasonings, we are entitled to conclude that the laws of Jesus, whether considered in themselves, or with respect to our power and inducements to obey them, are practicable and easy. Through our own fault indeed we may render the observance of them an intolerable burden. Through the influence of a weak or of a melancholy temper we may plant around them a thorny hedge of superstitions, and embitter our lives by restraints, and anxieties, and terrors to which the genuine spirit of the gospel is a total stranger. By declining to exert the necessary vigilance, or by exerting it only at intervals; by directing our whole attention

tion partially to certain virtues congenial to our temper or profession; while we allow corruption to steal in upon us from every other quarter; or by neglecting to employ habitually the established means of spiritual edification—by these and similar errors we may, no doubt, give to the powers of iniquity an undue advantage, and sink irrecoverably under the difficulties of our Christian service. But these errors spring from ourselves; and every motive of duty and interest concurs in calling upon us to correct them. We cannot expect to reach heaven unless we walk steadily in the road that leads to it. *Let us therefore lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us:* Let us labour to observe the whole law of Christ without exception or reserve: let us apply to it the same earnestness and activity which we bestow on the attainment of our temporal ends: and let us avail ourselves of every external and internal aid which the wisdom of our Father has provided for our support. Then may we rest assured that our advance towards perfection will be steady and uninterrupted. Every new step will be easier

and firmer than the step which preceded it, and will facilitate all the steps that are to follow. *We shall run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint.* For the angels of God will have charge concerning us to preserve us from falling. Our Redeemer himself will bend from his throne to cheer us in our course of obedience; and through the influence of his grace he will carry us safe and unfatigued to the land of eternal rest. Amen.

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SERMON XII.

JAMES, I, 8.

—*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

IN the commencement of this chapter, the apostle exhorts the converts from Judaism to bear with patience the persecutions to which their christian profession exposed them. For this purpose he advises them to ask of God the gift of heavenly wisdom, and assures them that if they ask it in faith, that is, fully convinced that their profession is right, and that it is their duty to adhere to it, they shall receive the aid that may be necessary to their support. At the same time he forewarns them, that if they ask without this conviction—if they still doubt the truth of their principles—if they

hesitate between the authority of Moses and the authority of Christ, uncertain which they shall follow, inclining sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other, they have no reason to expect from heaven the grace of perseverance. Their indecision will prevent that earnest sincerity which is necessary to the success of their prayers, and will render their conduct, like the principle from which it flows, wavering and unsteady. For *a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

The character which the apostle here condemns, though it may appear on a cursory view to partake more of weakness than of wickedness, is of very prejudicial tendency; and therefore I shall describe it more particularly, unfold the evils which it produces, and suggest the means of correcting it.

I. This phrase, *a double-minded man*, as here employed, marks out to us, not a man of hypocrisy and deceit, who forms one purpose and professes another; but a man whose purpose is not settled. He wavers between two objects of pursuit, as if he were actuated

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ed by two minds, that have different opinions, and lead him in different directions. Hence he is variable and inconstant in conduct, obeying sometimes the one impulse and sometimes the other, according as accident, or circumstances, or whim may have given to it a temporary preponderance. On this account you can never foresee to any distance, the line of conduct in which he will be found. If you follow him into the ordinary business of the world, you see him undecided and fickle, changing frequently his plans, his friends, his connections, his residence, his habits, and the whole scheme of his life. If you look at his moral deportment, you find him a slave to the prevailing passion of the moment, liberal or parsimonious, gentle or severe, industrious or slothful, refined or sensual, according to the state of the weather, or the present tone of his bodily constitution. Even his religious profession shifts with every gale of humour : this hour he is devout and sanctimonious, the next cold and indifferent : to-day he contends earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and to-morrow he will veer about with every wind of doctrine:

trine : this year he worships regularly and as he ought, at the established altars of his country, and the next, either *with itching ears* he will heap to himself sectarian teachers *according to his own lusts*, or caught in the cobwebs of a benumbing scepticism, he will care for none of these things.

This inconstancy of character, in some of its shades, occurs frequently to our view, because there are many mental defects from which it may spring. It arises sometimes from a natural feebleness and timidity of mind, which bends before the force of every new motive that is presented; and sometimes from an acquired irritability of temper, generated by the affectation of extreme sensibility, and producing on the character effects similar to those which are produced by natural imbecillity. Sometimes it arises from the undue force of a light, wandering, ill balanced imagination. Sometimes it arises from ignorance, or obscure undefined views of the object before us, which leave the understanding undetermined and exposed to the influence of contradictory illusions. Sometimes it arises from habits of indolent contemplation, which when not

accompanied by corresponding habits of decisive action, give only a facility of turning up the opposite sides of every question, and of discovering the difficulties in which it is involved, without leading to any fixed purpose concerning it. But most frequently this inconstancy arises from the contest of rival passions, which interfering with one another and prevailing by turns, dash our resolutions against each other, and toss them hither and thither, as waves are tossed by the winds.

All these causes of inconstancy, however, are subordinate to that doubleness of mind, that fluctuation of judgement which is mentioned in the text. It is the indecision of the understanding which communicates indecision to the feelings and the passions: it is the want of faith, or of a steady conviction that leaves the will irresolute, and gives instability to the conduct. While we doubt and balance and hesitate concerning the natural or moral value of the object of our choice, we can never pursue it with the full bent of our inclination. As long as we are not fully persuaded in our own mind, we see reasons for changing our opinion,
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and therefore we are liable to perpetual inconsistencies. Every difficulty alarms us ; every temptation presents the case to us under a new aspect ; and every new aspect of the case shakes and overturns our resolutions. Hence we become habitually irresolute and unsteady, and acquire by degrees that shifting, undetermined character, which renders us just objects of distrust to those with whom we associate, and disqualifies us both for the social and religious duties of our station.

It is not, however, every change of opinion or of plan that will subject a man to the degrading imputation of double-mindedness and instability. In this dark estate even the wisest of us is liable to error ; and when, in consequence either of experiment or of rational investigation, the error is clearly discovered, it becomes our duty and our glory to acknowledge and renounce it. In this case change is the consequence of deliberate enquiry and conviction ; it happens but seldom ; and when it does happen, it proceeds from a just exercise of the noblest powers which God has given us, and leads immediately to a fixed and final choice.

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But the double-minded man has no steady conviction on either side; for he receives his opinion not from reason, but from his passions or his humour. He makes no final choice, being habitually given to change. The sameness of an uniform and consistent conduct, like the sameness of an unvaried prospect, seems to fatigue his mind. Hence he has no sooner engaged in one pursuit than he begins to long for another; and having no fixed principle to guide him in his search, he gropes about for a place of rest which he is destined never to find. Thus "he is every thing by starts, and nothing long".

This fickleness and instability of character may to some men appear a fitter subject of ridicule than of serious reprehension. And indeed when it respects only the trifles of ordinary life, its correction may be safely left to the laugh of the world. But when it displays itself in regard to subjects of higher importance; when it mingles its influence with the principles of our moral and religious practice, it produces evils most ruinous and extensive—far more extensive and
ruinous

ruinous than can result from any single act of vice. It may therefore be proper,

II. To point out a few of those evils for the purpose of guarding you against the habit of mind from which they spring.

Under this head I shall not describe the meanness and debasement of spirit inseparably connected with habits of inconstancy, though nothing can more unequivocally indicate great weakness and degeneracy. For what can more degrade the character of a man than renouncing the noblest prerogative of his nature—that prudent forecast by which he commands events, and subjects to his purpose the variety of human things—to become the slave of accident, and to be driven like a wave of the sea and tossed? What more disgraceful to a Christian than, amid the shining light of the gospel, to lose his way, and wander uncertain what to pursue and what to avoid? *The wise man bath his eyes in his head* and sees the path before him; but the fool walketh in darkness and knoweth not what he is to do.

Neither

Neither shall I unfold the ruinous influence of inconstancy on your temporal prosperity, or paint its tendency to frustrate the accomplishment of all the purposes you form, to withdraw from you the confidence of those who must co-operate in their execution, and to hold you up to the derision of the world as solemn triflers who are ever busy and ever projecting, but who never advance a single step towards the attainment of their end.—These are considerations of great importance, and which merit deep attention from the men of this world. But I chuse rather to turn your view to the influence which instability is likely to have on your personal happiness, on the progress of your virtue, and on your preparation for heaven.

It is scarcely possible to conceive a disposition of which the natural tendency is more unfriendly to happiness than that of the double-minded man. He lives in a state of perpetual doubt and dissatisfaction. No sooner has he formed an opinion respecting the most momentous concerns of his condition, than he begins to hesitate about its truth, and to tremble for the
consequences

consequences of a mistake. No sooner has he reached a desireable object, or a situation in life on which his heart was set, than under an impression of its defects, he thinks that another is better, and longs to be delivered from it. Can happiness dwell with that man whose heart is thus divided between opposite views, distracted by contradictory interests, and torn by passions that mutually destroy each other!—who is disgusted in the evening with that which charmed him in the morning, who casts down to day the structure which he reared yesterday, and, at continual variance with himself, knows no fixed point of rest? Sooner may you expect to see a plenteous crop rise on shifting sands which are swept daily by the agitations of the tide, than contentment and joy growing on a soil so faithless and unstable.

But the case is still worse when we turn our eye to the moral qualities of human nature. For the unstable man, who has a conscience within him, must regard the opinions and plans he has relinquished not only as erroneous and contemptible, but often as criminal and hateful. His past
life

life must rise to his view as a succession of follies and crimes, where little is to be seen but abuses of his understanding and unpardonable perversions of the talents which have been entrusted to him by his Creator. The past therefore can reflect on him few gleams of joy, and the future can promise no increase to his happiness: for though he has now before him a new project of improvement; yet conscious of his weakness, and having little reason from experience to trust that he shall have perseverance to complete it, he must often fear that ere long it will become to him a new subject of repentance and change. Agitated thus between regret for the past and fears for the future, between new plans of conduct and the anticipation of deserting them, his mind is *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest.*

This instability of character is not only unfriendly to the temporal happiness, but also to the virtue and salvation of the man who indulges it. It cannot sustain the trials of life, and is totally inconsistent with that firm persevering fortitude which lies at the foundation of genuine worth. The double-
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mind man hesitates about his duty : he halts between God and Belial, between the strait narrow path that leads to heaven, and the broad way that tendeth to destruction. Having no fixed principles of conduct, he is turned aside by every temptation, and bends before every difficulty. He has built his house upon the sand, and when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, it falls and buries his virtue in its ruins.

A righteousness of this sort which vanishes, and reappears, and vanishes again like the sun struggling through mists, is not fit for the kingdom of heaven. Such a succession of relapses—such a flux and reflux of good and bad resolutions, tends sadly to harden and deprave the heart, to provoke the spirit of grace, and to beguile the infatuated sinner of the reward after which he aspires. It is only the man who continues patient in well-doing, rooted and stablished in the faith, that proves the sincerity and power of his principles ; it is *he only who endureth unto the end that shall be saved* : and to none but him who overcometh and who continues
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faithful unto death, hath Christ promised a crown of life.

From these considerations it is evident, Christians, that inconstancy is not a trivial failing which merely exposes a man to ridicule, and disqualifies him from acting an honourable manly part in society. It is a fundamental defect in his character, and a fruitful parent of the most destructive vices. It becomes us therefore

III. To investigate with solicitude the means by which it may be corrected, and

I. The foundation of every attempt for the cure of the evil must be laid in a deep sense of the greatness of the malady which requires to be remedied, for otherwise we shall not be disposed to submit to the prescriptions that are necessary for its removal. On this account it will be useful to cherish in our minds a deep impression of the mischiefs that result from inconstancy and irresolution, of the disgrace which a habit of change reflects on our character as men, of the reproach to which it exposes our Christian profession, of its malignant influence on our temporal prosperity and happiness, and

of its inconsistency with the virtue and perfection of our nature. Aided by this impression it will be proper

2. That we establish in our minds some general principles to serve as maxims in the conduct of life, and that we invest them with the authority of laws, which nothing shall on any account induce us to violate.

Fixed principles of this kind are for many reasons of inestimable value. They are commonly correct, being derived from very simple ideas, and formed in retirement, and at a distance from the delusions of passion. They spread their influence far and wide through the departments of human action : they are capable of easy and certain application to all the variety of particular cases which can occur : in all that variety of cases they secure consistency in our opinions and pursuits : and they are seen in every season of difficulty, as great landmarks set up in the pathless desert, to guide us safely through the precipices and pitfalls that lie in our course.

To furnish the tender mind with such principles, and to give it a facility in applying them is the most important part
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of a virtuous education. They serve in matters of conduct, the same useful purpose which universal truths serve in matters of science ; and, amid the diversity of springs that move us, they give to the train of our opinions and actions an uniformity which no other principle could be expected to produce. It is of the greatest importance, therefore, that these regulating maxims be well established in our minds, that they be interwoven into the very texture of our intellectual habits, and that they suggest themselves to us readily wherever they are applicable. For thus they will shew us, as it were by intuition, at all times and in full brightness, the part which it becomes us to act, and from which we cannot deviate without forsaking our principles, introducing inconsistency into our conduct, and *condemning ourselves in that which we allow.*

But besides forming such general principles which ought to be common to all men, and which embrace all the possible cases of human action, it will still farther be proper

3. That every individual attend particularly to the peculiar business of his own profession, and form a scheme of subordinate

dinate principles suited to it, which may in all points be consistent with his general maxims, which may coalesce readily with each other, and which may all tend, through the immediate object of pursuit, towards the final perfection of his nature. By thus arranging before hand the plan of his conduct he renders the course of his life a consistent whole, every part of which, like the wheels in a well constructed machine, has its proper place and determinate relation to the rest. Fortune may indeed often threaten to disconcert him, and untoward incidents may sometimes compel him even to abandon some of the less essential parts of his system. Yet if his plan has been formed in wisdom, and conducted with a prudent accommodation to his circumstances, he may trust that through perseverance he will be able to subject events to his control, and to proceed by an even undeviating path to the completion of his purpose.

But in order to secure himself effectually from the numerous temptations which will infallibly occur in the course of a long and complicated train of action, it will be necessary

4. That

4. That he keep a watchful eye on the quarter from which danger is most likely to arise, and be prepared instantly to resist and repel it. With this view he must be attentive to the mental defects formerly described as causes of inconstancy, and especially to those which belong peculiarly to himself. For every man has a weak side—some prevailing infirmity—some sin that easily besets him. This sin it is his duty to search out, and when he has found it, he must fasten on it his suspicions, and distrust all tendency to change in every matter to which it bears any relation. He must especially guard his regulating principles from its corrupting power, and never listen, at its suggestion, either to the infidel or to the scorner, who seek to set his passions in opposition to the truth, and strive by their enchantments to blind his understanding, and to extinguish the light that is in him. *Calling evil good, and good evil, putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, they lie in wait for the young man void of understanding. They sleep not except they have done mischief, and their sleep is taken away unless they cause some to fall.* Woe to him who

standeth in their way, who walketh in their counsel, and who sitteth with them in the chair of the scornful. From that moment instability is written on all his pursuits. His heart becomes hard as the barren rock, and when the seeds of virtuous resolution fall on it, they are scorched and wither away because they have no root.

To deliver us from these dangers we must not only form a system of principles adapted to the station we occupy, and exert our vigilance to guard them from every attack ; we must also, according to the admonition of the apostle in the verses which precede the text,

5. Ask assistance from God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. He can inspire us with wise purposes, and worthy resolutions. He is himself the Lord who changeth not, and he loveth to see in his children the image of his own steadfastness. Let us therefore ask him with earnestness to shew us the way in which we ought to walk, and enable us to follow it ; to endow us with the spirit of counsel for discerning our true interests, and with the spirit of might resolutely to pursue them ; to be
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at our right hand when the spirit of change approaches; and, amid all the fluctuations of fashion and of folly, to preserve us steadfast and immoveable in the discharge of our duty. We know that his ear will be open to our cry; and in testimony of our full conviction that he will hear us, and that he is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—let us ascribe to Him the only wise God our Saviour, glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.

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SERMON XIII.

LUKE, xxi, 19.

In your patience possess ye your souls.

IN this chapter Jesus forwarns his disciples of approaching calamities. The period fixed in the decree of heaven for dissolving the Jewish state was at hand, and unusual commotions both in the natural and moral world were to announce the hour of its destruction. The horrors of foreign and domestic war were to desolate the land: earthquakes, and pestilence, and famine were to consume its strength; and fearful visions of evils indefinite, and therefore still more alarming, were to terrify the minds of its inhabitants. Amidst these portentous events the lot of the faithful Christian was

to be peculiarly severe. Regarded by the superstition of his countrymen as accursed of God, as a pollution to their land, and as therefore accessory to the public disasters which threatened them, he was to become the object of their bitterest vengeance. But his cause was the cause of God ; and when the storm beat around him, it became him to retire within himself, and resting on the shield of his own integrity, to commit himself to the protection of heaven, and *in his patience to possess his soul.*

Though we, my brethren, may not be called to encounter evils equal to those experienced by the first Christians ; yet the scene in which we are placed presents to us innumerable occasions for the exercise of that patience and self-possession which were recommended to them. In the following discourse, therefore, I shall briefly consider the nature of this virtue, the inducements to cultivate it, and the means by which it may be attained.

I. Patience in general denotes a state of mind suited to suffering—a state which bears us up against the impressions of pain, and

which maintains us in the free exercise of reason and conscience amid all the evils to which we are exposed. As these evils are of very different kinds, there must of course be a corresponding variety in the appearances of the virtue which enables us to support them. According as they seem to proceed from God, from our neighbour, or from our own fault; according as they affect immediately our body or our mind, our reputation or our fortune, our wishes or our fears, the force of mind which enables us to meet them will assume peculiar characters suited to the circumstances in which we are placed. It will become resignation, meekness, tranquillity, acquiescence, resolution, fortitude or intrepidity according to the kind, and degree of evil which it has to conquer. But in all these cases patience is the fundamental quality, and manifests itself by that calm endurance which flinches not from the difficulties of our lot; by that steady composure which prevents every useless expression of our suffering, and by that self-possession which enables us to do the duties of the moment, and to take the measures proper for our condition.

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The virtue which manifests itself by these effects does not, however, imply insensibility to the evils which afflict us. Pain is one of the great springs appointed by Providence to move the activity both of our intellectual and moral powers, and must be felt before it can produce the valuable ends which it is intended to serve. Without the admonitions which it gives, we should not be qualified to subsist in the circumstances of our present condition. It can never therefore be our duty to eradicate the sensibilities of our nature, nor even to blunt their delicacy. The man of patience feels the evils of his situation, and feels them as acutely as any other man; but he is not conquered by them. He has a mind above their power: and though his body must yield to their natural effect on the human constitution; though he will seek earnestly relief from God, and employ every proper mean to obtain it, he cannot be driven by their influence to resign his self command, to mutter unavailing complaints, or to do any thing inconsistent with his duty.

It is true that a difference in point of constitutional sensibility may render the
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support of external evils more easy to some men than to others. Where pain is little felt, little force of mind, and consequently little virtue, is required to bear it. The composure manifested in these circumstances deserves the name of apathy rather than of patience; and however useful it may be on some occasions to the tranquillity of the sufferer, it is not a moral perfection, and cannot much exalt our opinion of his merit.

The same observation applies, in a great degree, to that partial semblance of patience which bears with apparent fortitude some of the evils that assail us, while it bends easily, and sinks under others. The hero, who in the field of glory can brave toil and wounds and death, has been often conquered by neglect, and found impatient of sickness, of contradiction or of hope deferred. The loss of fortune overwhelms one man, and the loss of friends another; while a third, by whom these evils are scarcely felt kindles into fury at the feeling of injustice, or pines away inconsolable under the poisoned blast of calumny. Nay, the very same evils which the sufferer has often met and
conquered,

conquered, are every day seen sufficient to unnerve and subdue him, when they approach in new circumstances, or under forms with which the imagination is less familiar. Now in all these cases the endurance, though useful in itself, and though sometimes accompanied with a degree of virtue, does not amount to the patience which religion requires. It proceeds not from the proper motive; it resides not with the governing principles of the mind; its effects are not uniform and universal. Flowing from casual associations, and receiving little direction from reason, it is not at our command, and cannot support our constancy under all the variety of ills which assail us.

The patience then, in which we are exhorted to possess our souls, is neither insensibility to the hardships of our lot, nor that partial endurance which manifests itself only on particular occasions. It is a fixed and permanent capacity of resisting the evils which we feel, from whatever cause they may arise, or in whatever form they may assail us. Resting on a noble firmness of mind, either infused by God himself into the principles of our frame, or formed within us by
habitual

habitual sentiments of duty, it meets the whole family of pain with undaunted countenance ; and though pierced and wounded by the arrows that fall on it, advances through them, calm and unconquered, to the object of pursuit.

Of this steady suffering virtue which is not overcome of evil, which bears with calmness the inflictions of Providence, and the injustice of the world ; which takes patiently the spoiling of goods, the death of friends, the pinings of disease, and the pangs of disappointed hope ; which looks back without murmuring to comforts that are lost, and forward without despair to the still blacker storms that seem gathering on our way—of this calm unsubdued patience we have many instructive examples in the history of the saints. See Moses in the wilderness of Sinai wounded by the ungrateful suspicions of the people, and provoked by their endless reproaches and rebellions, yet advancing at their head, and earnestly interceding with heaven for forgiveness to them. See Eli grieved by the misconduct of his sons, forewarned of the judgments that awaited them, beholding in terrific vision
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the approaching dissolution of his house, and saying, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Behold Job, once the greatest of all the men of the east, suddenly stript of his possessions, receiving in one hour accounts of the loss of all his flocks and herds, of the murder of his servants, of the death of his seven sons, and of his three daughters—See him after all this smitten in person with sore disease, yet mingling praises with his groans, and replying to the insults of those who should have comforted him, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil.* Contemplate the noble army of witnesses who for the sake of a good conscience *were tortured not accepting deliverance; who had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments; who were stoned and sawn asunder, and tempted and slain with the sword, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.* Contemplate the lives of these illustrious sufferers, and mark the nature and the power of their patience. Above all turn your eye to the history of your Redeemer, *THE MAN OF SORROWS,*

ROWS, and learn from him how to conduct yourselves through all the variety of human misery. See him pinched with bitter poverty, houseless and unhonoured, sore vexed with the wickedness and ingratitude of those among whom he lived, pierced by the roughest shafts of calumny, persecuted by enemies, betrayed by the companion whom he trusted, deserted in the hour of his utmost need by the friends whom he had chosen from the world, and dragged at last through many painful indignities to a cruel and ignominious death.—See him through this sad succession of suffering exhibiting often signs of the keenest and most exquisite sensibility, sweating, in the agony of his soul, as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground; yet preserving throughout the evenness and composure of a great unbroken mind. No complaint escapes him, no word unbecoming the character which he sustained. He neglects no duty to God or to man which the present circumstances of his condition required. His whole conduct displays the attention, and freedom, and dignity of a mind perfectly at ease. *When reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered,*

fered, he threated not; but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously. Behold, Christians, this patern of suffering virtue! It will enlighten you concerning the true nature of christian fortitude, and explain better than a thousand precepts how in patience you should possess your souls.

From these reasonings and examples it is obvious that the patience which thus sustains the ills of life depends in a great measure on the sufferer himself. It is the child of virtuous resolution;—the attribute of a mind fortified by early habits of self-command, and enlightened by a just view of the divine government, and of the trials that are necessary to form man to perfection. It is, at the same time, a virtue very difficult to practise. It is opposed to pain, the first, the most powerful, and the most continued stimulant that affects us from without; and its exertions are often called for in the absence of those animating considerations which support the practice of so many other virtues. The magistrate, for instance, encounters the fatigues of public duty encouraged by the knowledge that he acts in the view of his country; the hero is urged

glory by the voice of fame: and deeds of beneficence are immediately repaid both by the gratitude of the receivers, and by the affectionate homage of all who witness their effect. But the patient sufferer most frequently sits alone; his most meritorious struggles are unseen; and his noblest victories, unaided by foreign support, are due solely to the vigour of his own mind, and to his sense of what is right. On this account, it may be useful as we proposed,

II. To state more particularly the inducements that recommend the cultivation of this virtue.

And here I begin by observing that the exercise of patience is highly conducive to happiness. It both diminishes the pain of the sufferer, and gives satisfaction to all who witness his conduct.

Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. By the appointment of heaven, suffering is indispensibly requisite to our improvement; and therefore we cannot possibly escape the causes from which it comes. But by bearing it calmly we may soften and alleviate the uneasiness
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which it produces. Though the dart must fall and wound us, the balm of patience will check the rankling of its poison, and give us peace even in the midst of sorrow.

To many of the evils which afflict the hearts of men, patience brings instant and infallible relief. Besides preserving to the understanding that calmness and freedom of thought which enable us to see and to employ the best means of deliverance, it frequently operates as a direct antidote to the sorrow that oppresses us. This is the case particularly with all those disquietudes which spring from opinion, and which regard things external to ourselves, such as fortune, honours or power. These objects derive their charm from accidental associations; they are not necessary constituents of human happiness, and patience under the loss of them soon gives to the mind an experimental conviction that our self-enjoyment is beyond their reach, that they are only ambiguous blessings, and that therefore we need not be much dejected at their departure. Nay, even for evils that assail us more closely, and affect our personal condition—for bodily pain and disease

themselves, there is no balsam, no restorative more effectual than the exercise of patience. It sweetens the humours of the body, and by giving rest to the animal system, allows the healing powers of nature to produce their effect undisturbed. Ask your physician, and he will tell you that the composure which patience inspires is essential to the success of all his prescriptions, that the stores of his art contain no alterative so powerful as the human imagination, and that there is no medicine equal in virtue to the medicine of a quiet and contented mind.

The exercise of patience, therefore, contributes directly to the advantage of the sufferer himself. It renders him at the same time more amiable and interesting to others, and consequently draws to him their kindness and esteem. He vexes not, nor repels his dependents by the outbreaks of peevishness; he offends no man by murmurs and complaints; but, even in the midst of his deepest afflictions, exhibits to those who approach him, the sublime attractive spectacle of a countenance smiling in grief; of a mortal man who feels his

sorrows, but whom neither fear nor distress, nor torture can subdue. It is obvious then that this state of mind diminishes the sum of human misery; and that when pain was sent unto the earth, for the purposes of correction, patience was, in wisdom and mercy, appointed to accompany it, to soften its aspect, and to render it in the end subservient to happiness.

But patience is not only useful as a shield to our happiness. It is also

2. A duty which we are bound to practise.

The pains and calamities to which we are subject form a part in the established order of providence. They proceed from God, and are as necessary to the completion of his purpose, as any of the other arrangements by which he governs this lower world. Many beneficial effects resulting from them to the general system of things are obvious even to our eye; and there may be many others which lie beyond the sphere of our vision. But whatever be their effects, they are part of the order of nature; they come upon us by the ordination of heaven; and it is our duty to submit to

him who hath appointed them. While our condition on the whole affords a surplus of happiness, either in enjoyment or in prospect, we have no reasonable foundation for complaint, even though our sufferings were in no degree the consequences of our own fault. For as the scriptures argue, *who art thou, O man, that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Is it not lawful for him to do what he will with his own?* Though therefore we knew no reason for the appointment of the sorrows he has destined for us, it would be our duty as the creatures of God to bear them with patience. But if they be, as they certainly are, consequences of our sins, and means of correcting our errors—if they contribute to raise us from the debasement of our fall, and to nurse within us the noblest and most honourable virtues, *wherefore should a living man complain?* Is he not bound by a sense of what he owes both to God and to himself to turn to the best advantage the circumstances in which he is placed, and to practise the virtues which they are fitted to form? In this view patience under the hardships of our condi-

condition would be a duty in itself, though it were connected with no other obligation, and led to no recompence of glory. But when we consider that it lies at the foundation of a manly character, that it is an element in the composition of all the more dignified virtues, and that it draws, in an eminent degree, the esteem and admiration of mankind, can there remain any doubt concerning our obligation to cultivate it? Without it there could be no steadiness nor consistency in our conduct—no perseverance in valuable pursuits—no firmness in a good cause—no heroic fortitude in the midst of dangers and death. These, however, are qualities of high worth, which throw an interest and dignity around the sufferer, which tend more than any others to ennoble their possessor, and which make an essential part in our conception of a perfect character. The patience therefore which forms them must be a duty of great importance;—a duty which cannot be neglected without undermining the very foundations of all virtuous attainment.

These considerations demonstrate that the state of mind recommended by the text

is indispensible both to the happiness and to the perfection of our nature. The art of maintaining it through all the various disquietudes of our lot is perhaps the most valuable art which we are called to cultivate. And I therefore propose, in another discourse, to lay down some rules for your assistance in this important duty.

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SERMON XIV.

The same Subject continued.

LUKE, XXI, 19.

—*In your patience, possess ye your souls.*

WE have already seen that patience is a state of mind suited to suffering ; that though it does not destroy our sense of pain, it bears us up under the various evils of our lot, maintaining the soul through them all in the free exercise of its powers, and in the manly discharge of the duties becoming our condition. It is a virtue very difficult to practise ; but the occasions which call for it are numerous ; and the possession of it is indispensibly necessary both to our happiness, and to the moral perfection of our nature. No art can be more valuable in itself, or more useful in its effects, or cultivated

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ed with greater certainty of success. It is of great importance therefore that we understand the means of acquiring it, and that we be resolved habitually and steadily to employ them. With a view to assist you in this pursuit, I propose at present to suggest some rules which, through the blessing of God, may tend to fortify you against the inquietudes of your condition, and to enable you to possess your souls in patience.—And

I. It will be useful that we meditate frequently on the contingencies of our present condition, and on the certainty that affliction in some of its forms must fall to our share. We shall thus become familiar with its appearances, and meet its approach with all the advantage which due forethought and preparation are fitted to give.

That no man can promise to himself perpetual exemption from suffering is a truth obvious to daily observation. Nay, amid the shiftings of the scene in which we are placed, who can say that, for one hour, his happiness is secure? The openings through which we may be assailed are so numerous

and unguarded, that the very next moment may see some messenger of pain piercing the bulwarks of our peace. Our body may become the seat of incurable disease. Our mind may become a prey to unaccountable and imaginary fears. Our fortune may sink in some of those revolutionary tempests which overwhelm so often the treasures of the wealthy. Our honours may wither on our brow, blasted by the slanderous breath of an enemy. Our friends may prove faithless in the hour of need, or they may be separated from us for ever. Our children, the fondest hope of our hearts, may be torn from us in their prime; or they may wound us still more deeply by their undutifulness and misconduct. Alas! my brother of the dust, in this uncertainty of worldly blessings, where is the joy on earth in which thou canst repose thy confidence? or what defence canst thou rear against the inroads of adversity? Dost thou hope that by rising to power, or by increasing thy goods, thou wilt ensure the continuance of thy comfort? Vain Man! hast thou not seen that the loftiest mountain meets first the lightnings of the sky, and that the spreading

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ing tree, when loaded with the glories of its foliage and fruit, is most easily broken by the fury of the blast? In this manner, the children of this world, by multiplying their stores and extending their connections, furnish a broader mark to the arrows of misfortune, and with the greater certainty suffer disappointment and sorrow.

Since therefore pain in some of its forms will certainly overtake us, it becomes us to live in expectation of its approach. By so doing, we shall be freed at least from the danger of surprize, and prepared by our previous habits of reflection to exert our fortitude, (where it is most necessary) on the first attack of distress. Thus time will be given to summon up the auxiliaries of our patience, and to recollect that the sufferings we endure, are the unavoidable lot of humanity. And when we are satisfied that no temptation hath taken us but what is common to man, we shall meet with courage the appointed trials of our virtue, and resolve that what we must bear, we will bear like men.

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2. We should cultivate habitually the temper of mind that is favourable to patience.

There are various dispositions of soul on which this virtue grows naturally as on its proper soil. In some men we find a lightness and gaiety of heart which adversity cannot depress. They view all events on the fairest side; they see readily, and associate with their own condition, the springs of comfort; they are disposed to laugh at care, and to play even with their misfortunes. To others the balm of hope comes to mitigate their afflictions. Through the dark magnifying cloud of sorrow in which fear would invest their present sufferings, they look at the sunshine on the distant mountains, and wait in patience for the expected time of deliverance. There are others still who from calmness of temper and moderation in desire easily resist the transports of passion. They feel not the keenness of worldly enterprize, because they do not set a high value on the objects towards which it is directed; and hold on the noiseless tenor of their way through restraints and disappointments which rouse the

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the man of ambition into madness. Now as these and similar states of mind are friendly to the exercise of patience, it becomes us in our endeavours to learn this virtue to direct to them a share of our attention—to be habitually as chearful, as free from anxiety, and as full of hope, as may be consistent with the peculiarities of our natural constitution, and the course which it marks out for our improvement. We should especially labour to avoid the stings of an evil conscience; for self reproach adds poison to misfortune. It renders the mind sore, fretful, and suspicious; more susceptible of injury from outward distress, more liable to internal disquietude, more ready to vent its uneasiness in fretfulness and complaint. It becomes him who would acquire the virtue of patience therefore to watch over the general temper of his mind; because he may be assured that *a merry heart will be a continual feast and do good like a medicine; that to the upright light will arise in darkness; and that great peace have they who love the law of God, and nothing shall offend them.*

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3. In the prospect of cultivating this virtue, we should accustom ourselves betimes to exertions of patience, and learn from the actual suffering of inconvenience to endure hardiness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Man, with respect both to his intellectual and moral attainments, is very much the creature of habit. And in no instance is the power of this principle more conspicuous than in fortifying his mind against the impressions of pain. The peasant and the labourer sustain without effort toils and privations which, if suddenly applied, would overwhelm those who have been nursed in the bosom of plenty. Men accustomed to misfortune seem scarcely to feel the weight of calamities, which, if they fell on the prosperous, would bend them at once in sorrow to the ground. Their sensibility to suffering is blunted; the active exertion necessary to resist it has become easy through repetition; and they find from experience that the prospect of evil is much more intolerable than its actual endurance. Hence it is obvious, that in a state where pain must often be our lot, we should prepare to meet it, as the soldier prepares himself for the fatigues

tigues of a campaign, by voluntary conflicts with misfortune, and by bearing manfully the lesser hardships of ordinary life. These hardships we should not be too anxious to avoid; we should not murmur at them when they overtake us; nor train ourselves to future misery by stretching ourselves for ever on the bed of indulgence. *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth;* and whatever the fond mother may fear, there is no part of her son's education more essential to his welfare than those restraints, and severities, and bitter contests with his equals, which the feverish sensibility of modern softness has too often affected to deplore.

4. We should fortify ourselves against the day of misfortune by rendering familiar to our minds all the considerations which prove patience to be a duty which we cannot innocently neglect.

A sense of duty has powerful force in producing the exertions that are requisite to its discharge. In virtuous minds it is superior to every other motive, and carries them forward to the work of righteousness in defiance of difficulty or danger. Being connected in their thoughts with the ideas
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of indispensable obligation, of divine assistance, and of future reward, it is felt as a prevailing incentive to the course of conduct which it recommends. Of what value then must it be in the study of patience to have on our minds a steady conviction that the want of it is a defect in our character, and a direct violation of our duty !

The considerations which demonstrate that patience is a moral duty were formerly explained at length. It is a state of mind suited to the circumstances in which we are placed by the great Author of our being—it is an ornament to the human character—it forms an element in the composition of all its higher virtues—it is subsidiary to their practice, and must therefore be followed by a portion of their reward. If these considerations rest on our thoughts, they will awaken within us the sentiments of duty ; they will guard us against the bursts of impatience as a degradation of our character ; they will suggest to us that impatience is not only an imperfection, of which we should be ashamed, but also rebellion against heaven ; and under this impression, they will enable us, when tried

with sore affliction, to say with Job, *Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered? Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me; my righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go, my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

5. We should accustom ourselves to consider the evils which befall us in their true point of view as exercises of our virtue, and means of promoting our future good.

It seems to be a general rule in the improvement of human nature, that every advance which we make towards perfection is preceded by a feeling of uneasiness. In almost all cases, painful impressions are requisite to rouse our slumbering powers into action. Our perceptive faculties, the first instruments of thought, and the inlets of all our knowledge from without, do not exert themselves till stimulated by the forcible application of external bodies to our organs of sense. The understanding does not employ its higher powers to combine the information which the senses furnish, till such combination becomes necessary for removing some experienced inconvenience. And our will must feel the stings of desire, before it put into motion

motion the active springs of the soul. The feeling of evil therefore must, from his very constitution, be to man the great incentive to beneficial exertion. Accordingly we find from experience that the painful sensations of hunger and thirst called forth the first efforts of his animal nature to obtain relief; that the feebleness of the individual, the dangers that beset him, and the horrors of solitude drove him into society, and retain him in it: and that the new wants which society generated, together with its competitions, its oppressions, and its wars, have gradually unfolded the latent capacities of his mind, and raised him to that intellectual perfection in which we now behold him.

As the wants and difficulties of life have thus obviously tended to expand and perfect the capacities of our intellectual nature, so we have reason, both from experience and scripture, to believe that distress and affliction are no less salutary in their influence on our virtue. They are the storms which agitate and purify the moral sky. Though just consequences of our misconduct, they are converted, by the wisdom of our Father; into means of correcting it; and *though for*

the present they be not joyous but grievous, nevertheless they yield the peacable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby. Disease stops the sinner in his career of folly, rouses him to serious reflexion, and at the same time weakens the passions that seduced him. Loss of friends and of worldly substance is frequently the mean of rectifying disorders in the state of our affections, of teaching us the vanity of confiding in adventitious advantages, and of demonstrating that to man there is no blessing on earth equal to that of virtue and a good conscience. In short, every sorrow which we feel, whatever its cause may be, is calculated to try the sincerity of our principles; to call up within us the manly powers of resistance; and, by the compelled exercise of faith and fortitude, to train us gradually to the dignity and perfection of our nature. *The sadness of the countenance, therefore, is employed to make the heart better. And when we are in heaviness through manifold temptations, it is that the trial of our faith, being much more precious than that of gold which perisheth, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

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A firm and habitual conviction of this general doctrine will prove a powerful support to the heart, either in the prospect, or under the feeling of any particular affliction. Instead of repining at the misfortunes that have overtaken us, if misfortunes they may be called, it will lead us to examine the use that should be made of them, to apply ourselves resolutely to improve the advantage which they furnish, and *to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of our faith worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope,* and that hope is to a good man the anchor of the soul, and the pledge of future salvation.—In conformity with this rule we should, as a support to patience

6. Cherish in our hearts a deep conviction of the superintending care of Providence, and of the happiness prepared in heaven for those who have struggled and overcome.

The present state of things is a system of means appointed by the Almighty for restoring the perfection of our fallen race. All its parts are under his direction, and each of them in its proper place, advances

the purpose of his goodness. The evils with which it abounds are especially the instruments by which he accomplishes his gracious designs. They come at his command ; they fulfil the decree which he hath given ; and when they have served their appointed end, he dismisses them from the scene. *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it ? Yea, saith He, I am the Lord alone, and there is none else, I form the light and create darkness ; I make peace and create evil ; I the Lord do all these things.* Why then should the faithful servant of God murmur at the hardships of his condition ? Whatever these hardships may be, whether they affect your health or your fortune, your reputation or your life, they are the appointment of your Father, who knows their number, weight and measure, who accommodates them to the respective necessities of his children, who sees the effect which each of them produces, and who causes them all to work together for your good. All the parts of his wide dominion are at every moment present to his view. *Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without his notice : and the very hairs of your head are all numbered :*

numbered. He standeth by your side when you lie down, and when you rise up: and he hath promised that if you trust in him, *he will never leave you nor forsake you; that his grace will be sufficient for you; and in particular that he will not suffer you to be tempted, or afflicted, above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The sorrows that try our patience then are continually in the hand of God, and they are permitted, as instruments of his government, to afflict us for the most friendly purpose—to detach our hearts from this world, to inflame us with a desire of the incorruptible happiness of heaven, and to render us worthy of the glory that remains to be revealed. For those who bear them with Christian fortitude they prepare the honour of a nobler reward. *What are these,* said the Elder to St. John, beholding in vision the future condition of the blessed, *What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence come they? These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne*

of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.—If then, Christians, we wish to attain the grace of patience, let these consoling thoughts rest on the imagination of our hearts. Dwelling thus, as it were, in the secret place of the Most High, we shall abide under the shadow of his wings. And when the arrows of adversity fly around us, secure under the shield of the Almighty, we shall be able to say with the apostle, *Nay in all these things I am more than a conqueror ; for I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him.*

The rules which I have now explained, Christians, are of great importance. The habitual observance of them will gradually form a temper of mind which is allied to all the virtues. It will fortify you especially, not only against those transient bursts of impatience which trifling causes sometimes excite in ill regulated minds, but against the dejection and sorrows which flow from deep affliction. In those dark seasons when the comforts of this world are withdrawing—when inevitable dangers press thick and close around us—when we languish under the

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the hopeless pain of incurable disease—when death tears from us in succession the dearest objects of our affection—or when we stand ourselves on the brink of the grave, called to give an account of our stewardship, what support will arise to the soul from the habits of thought which have now been suggested, and from the conviction that aid cometh to us from the Lord who made the heavens and the earth? To him therefore, in addition to our own preparations, to him our voice will rise in fervent prayer for grace to help us in the time of need. Submitting ourselves in humility to his appointments, and suppressing every rebellious murmur, we shall implore wisdom to discern the true use of our sorrows, and strength to bear them with becoming fortitude. Under this discipline patience will have her perfect work; even to them who have no might it will increase strength; and *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory.* Amen.

SERMON XV.



ACTS XXVI, 17, 18.

—Unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

THESE words form part of the charge delivered to the Apostle Paul at the time of his conversion. Under the influence of an honest but mistaken zeal for the institutions of Moses, he was on his way to Damascus with a commission to persecute and imprison the followers of Christ. As he journeyed, and had come near to that city, a light from heaven, *above the brightness of the sun*, shone round about him. Jesus descending from on high appeared to him in person, reprov-

reproved his persecuting spirit, communicated to him new views of divine truth, and charged him thenceforth to employ his zeal in support of that faith which he was now labouring to subvert. *I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ; delivering thee from the people, and from the gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*

The words of the text, therefore, contain the instructions which Jesus himself gave to Paul, for directing him in the future discharge of his duty as a preacher of the gospel. They explain to him the end of those labours in which he was now called to engage, and the means by which that end was to be effected. Guilty men were to be prepared for the favour of God and an heavenly inheritance, through their deliverance from the power of the devil, by the knowledge which the preaching of the gospel should

should convey. Accordingly the Apostle is sent to open their eyes, for the purpose of turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by the faith in Christ.

From this passage, then, we receive a clear explanation of the method in which, by the appointment of God, and under the influence of his spirit, the gospel accomplishes its purpose. It prepares the faithful for heaven by the effectual culture which it gives both to the intellectual and moral powers of our nature. It conveys light to the understanding; and that light unveiling the delusions of sin, destroys its power over the heart, and improves the whole man. It thus renders us proper subjects of pardon, and qualifies us for the inheritance of the saints.

It may be useful, *1st*, To review briefly the principal points of this divine knowledge which the gospel communicates; and *2dly*. To shew that all this knowledge is practical, and must operate in preparing us
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for heaven, by reforming and sanctifying the heart.

I. The revelation which contains this precious deposit of light and truth became necessary to man only in consequence of the fall. The happiness and perfection of his primitive condition were sufficiently secured by the natural powers of that frame which, on the day of his creation, God pronounced to be good. Revelation was an extraordinary expedient, accommodated to a new state of being, for which the original constitution of things had made no adequate provision. Its doctrines, therefore, must be expected to have often a character which the natural reason of man could not anticipate ; and they must have a peculiar reference to the principles of conduct which suited the new circumstances in which he was placed. Hence the teachers of religion can have no peculiar light to give us concerning the animal state of man, and the arts subservient to his temporal subsistence and accommodation ; because for these purposes sufficient provision is made in the rational principles of his frame. The instructions

tions sent from heaven refer chiefly to his moral condition, and to the arrangements made, under the divine government, for recovering him from the power and punishment of in.

On these points, the scriptures give us the most direct and satisfactory information. They teach us that Jesus the Son of God, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, was appointed from the beginning to administer a spiritual kingdom established for destroying the work of the devil, and for restoring the race of men to their place in the family of heaven: that for this purpose, the way before him being prepared by a most wonderful series of events, he appeared on earth to reveal to them the will of God, and by the sacrifice of himself, to make complete satisfaction for their offences: that rising from this state of humiliation, he now sits at his Father's right hand, the King and Guardian of his people, pleading their cause, sending from on high, through the intervention of the Holy Ghost, power to aid them in their labours of virtue; and by the over-ruling energy of his providence, causing all things to work together

ther for promoting their salvation : that at the consummation of his plan, he will come, in the glory of his power, to make a final separation between the righteous and the wicked ; and in the view of assembled worlds, to give to each of them the recompence that is meet : and that then shall be the end, when having *destroyed the last enemy death, and gathered into one all things that are in heaven and on earth, he shall deliver the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.*

The interests of this invisible kingdom of grace have had the most important and extensive influence on the course of human affairs. It was the peculiar charge of Providence from the beginning of the world, and in subservience to it, empires rose and fell. But of this influence, and even of the kingdom itself, human reason could never have discovered the smallest trace. The clear and consolatory knowledge which we now possess concerning its origin, its progress, its means of accomplishing its object, its beneficial effects, and its final consummation, flows solely from the gospel of Christ, and forms a portion of that heavenly light which his Apostles were sent to shed on the nations.

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But besides revealing to us this great body of interesting truths, of which no ray could otherwise have reached us, the gospel of Jesus has, in a remarkable degree, enlarged and corrected all the knowledge which nature could furnish for directing the moral conduct of man. It explains to him distinctly his origin and end, the nature of his present condition, the relations which he bears to other beings, especially to God and his fellow men, the various duties to which these relations give rise, the consequent obligations that bind him to discharge them, the means of his rising to moral perfection, and the inestimable reward prepared in heaven for them, who *by a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality.*

On these subjects the powers of the human understanding could indeed make some discoveries. *The invisible things of God might be seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead. Men were by nature a law unto themselves, and shewed the works of the law written in their hearts.* And there has been no nation
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where the sanctions of duty, and the hope of better things to come, have not been occasionally felt and cherished as supports to the soul. But how feeble, alas! and uncertain, how shifting and deceitful was the light enjoyed, on these points, even by the wisest of the heathen! And among the body of the people, how sadly was even this pale glimmering, broken and dispersed by the mists of superstition and idolatry! *When they knew God they glorified him not as God; but changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.* In these circumstances, how was it possible to prevent their judgments of duty from being corrupted by the impurities of their religious creed, and from being regulated more by views of expediency than by the feeling of moral obligation? How could they believe that clean hands and a pure heart were necessary to the acceptable worship of Divinities who were themselves the slaves of appetite and passion? What feelings of shame or remorse could they connect with crimes, through which their Gods had risen to the skies? And by what pro-

cess of reasoning could they be persuaded that the blessings of the future world (if a future world at all existed) were to be reserved, under the government of such beings, for the reward of integrity and virtue?

It would be easy to pursue this train of thought, and to shew from innumerable facts, that the moral information furnished by the light of nature was defective in itself, and, from the circumstances in which it appeared, totally incapable of being applied to reform the human heart. Its insufficiency for this purpose was seen and bewailed by the best and wisest of those who were confined to it. They felt the period in which they lived to be *a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains.* They longed and prayed earnestly to be delivered from it. And lo! the object of their warmest wish is now accomplished. A beam hath shone from Zion to enlighten the understandings of men, and to guide their feet into the way of peace. Jesus Christ, through his own ministry and the ministry of his prophets and apostles, hath unveiled

unveiled before us the face of heaven, and taught us to discern, on the throne of the universe, one eternal omnipotent God, the Creator, the Preserver, and the Governor of all things visible and invisible ; who possesses every possible perfection without the least shadow of defect ; who is for ever present through all the parts of his boundless dominion, directing all its energies and operations : who is goodness itself, and never ceases to communicate blessings to his creatures in proportion to their capacity : whose eye is especially on the penitent children of men, whom he loveth with an everlasting love, pleased through Christ with their service of obedience, accepting the righteous homage which they present to him in sincerity and faith, restoring to them the gift of immortality, and, by a most wonderful series of means, training them for a state of pure and never ending happiness in heaven.

These discoveries concerning the character of God, and the state and prospects of man, are delivered in scripture with an exactness of delineation that satisfies the understanding, with an authority that com-

mands assent, and with an adaptation to the circumstances of our condition which is fitted to give them powerful effect on conduct. Wherever their sound has reached they have banished at once polytheism and idolatry, with the numerous corruptions that sprung from them. They support the dominion of right principles in the soul, and have, as we proposed to shew

2dly. A natural tendency to reform the conduct of those who receive them, to turn them from the power of Satan unto God, and to prepare them for an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

That this was the design of all the doctrines revealed from heaven, that they were intended to have a reforming as well as an enlightening power we learn not only from the express declaration of the text, but from innumerable other passages of scripture. Christ was foretold by the prophets as *the righteous branch, the servant of God, who should bring forth judgment to the Gentiles, and who should not fail nor be discouraged, till he should set righteousness in the earth,* His fore-runner appeared preparing the way before him, by preaching the *baptism*
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of repentance, and turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. Jesus, when he came, proclaimed the same doctrine of repentance, and sanctified himself, that they also, whom the father had given him, might be sanctified through the truth. And his apostles uniformly declare, that he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil; that he was sent to bless us in turning away every one of us from his iniquities; that he gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works; and that his doctrine of grace teacheth us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.

It is therefore undeniable, that the light, which christianity diffuses, was given for the purpose of reforming the hearts of those on whom it should shine. And a more effectual mean for accomplishing this end cannot be conceived. It leaves the liberty of man, and consequently his capacity of moral action untouched; it supplies him with an infallible guide in the path of virtue, and with the most persuasive in-

duancements to follow its direction ; and while all its doctrines have a practical influence ; while they are all powerfully fitted to move the springs of the human will ; they are uniformly exhibited in scripture in close connection with their natural effect. Are we called to contemplate the omniscience of the ever present Deity ? It is that we may be armed against temptation by the sense of an invisible witness who *searches the hearts, and whose eyes are upon all our ways, to give to every one according to the fruit of his doings.* Is the death of Christ, for the redemption of sinners, presented to our view ?—It is that we may be *made conformable unto his death, by dying to sin ; and that we may be constrained to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again.* In short, are we desired to follow him by the eye of faith, through the glories of his ascension and of his second coming ?—It is that we may see him seated on the throne of his moral kingdom, subduing the enemies of virtue, furnishing support to his servants in their labours of obedience, separating the righteous from the wicked, as the husbandman separates the wheat from

from the chaff, and by a final sentence rendering to each of them according as his work has been.

The doctrines of Christianity, therefore, as exhibited in scripture, are always addressed to the heart, and employed to guide it to the practice of righteousness. Coming as they do from God, they could indeed be no otherwise exhibited; for the distinction between the Understanding and the Will exists only for the purposes of human science. In nature and by the appointment of God they are united. They belong to the same indivisible mind, which can indeed exert itself differently according to the circumstances in which it acts; but which must feel at once, and through all its powers, every thing that affects it. Hence, the abstract and merely intellectual views of religious truth, which theologians have sometimes given, are useful only for the purposes of reasoning and speech. Like all other abstractions, they originate in the imperfection of the human faculties; and presenting only partial views of their subject, they are extremely apt to mislead. Both in philosophy and religion, such abstractions, when ap-
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plied to practice, have been great sources of error. Nothing corresponding to them occurs actually either in nature or in the word of God. There, causes and their effects, principles and the actions which flow from them, are seen in conjunction. They are known only in their mutual connection. Accordingly the faith of the gospel is never represented in scripture as a speculation of the understanding, but as a virtue of the heart. We learn there, that *with the heart men believe unto righteousness, and that through this faith their hearts are purified*; that, on the contrary, *the wicked err in heart, and through an evil heart of unbelief depart from the living God.*—As in the natural world, the light of the sun is never seen separated from its warming and vivifying power, so in the world of grace, the light of divine truth must operate in warming and stimulating the heart into which it has been duly admitted. It may indeed meet with circumstances that limit and modify its operation; it may be obscured and counteracted by the chilling remains of doubt. Even the convictions of an enlightened Christian may be at times forgotten; their
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influence may be occasionally intercepted by the mists of prejudice ; or they may be overborne, for a moment, by more dazzling conviction generated by the passions. But wherever the rays of truth are clearly and distinctly felt, their natural effect will follow, in proportion to their power. Is it possible with a believing heart, to conceive in all its aspects, that love of God which passeth understanding without emotions of gratitude, and a disposition to make some return ? Is it possible to believe that Christ stands by our side, deeply interested in our cause, ever ready to exert his omnipotent power for our support ; and at the same instant to sink in despair before the approach of temptation ? Is it possible to murmur at the afflictions which befall us, while we regard them as the appointments of God for our good, sent in mercy to our souls, and most wisely accommodated to the present circumstances of our particular condition ? Can we contemplate the ravishing glories of the world to come, steadily convinced that they are realities, and that through Christ, we may rise to the full possession of them ; and not feel at the moment

ment an aspiration and endeavour to attain them? No, Christians! constituted as man is, these things cannot happen. They are moral impossibilities. The supposition of them involves a contradiction to the natural principles of our frame. According to these principles, the light which the gospel conveys into the mind, if cordially received, must mingle with the desires and affections: It must produce the consolation, or solicitude, or obedience, to which it is adapted, and render faith the victory which overcometh the world.

From these considerations the inference is obvious, that the knowledge which the apostle carried to the nations was practical in its nature; that it possesses a reforming energy, and is the instrument of God for exalting the character of man, and restoring him to happiness and perfection. It was not given to serve the purposes of intellectual amusement; but to be the guide of life, to sustain us under the difficulties of our probationary state, to form us to the duties of our earthly condition, and through them, to qualify us for the enjoyment of God in heaven.

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The same considerations lead us to understand distinctly in what consists the true preaching of the gospel—a phrase full of valuable meaning, but often most grossly misapplied. It consists not in detailing the personal feelings of the speaker, nor in recounting the supposed conversions he has witnessed : these form no part of the light that was committed to the Apostles ; and to detail them is to preach not the gospel of Christ, but the private history of the speaker and his friends. It consists not in explaining to the people the thin distinctions of metaphysical theology ; for these distinctions are not found in scripture, and though they may be necessary to the preacher as a man of science set up for the defence of the truth, they are too abstract to influence the heart, and can be of no use in promoting the practical ends for which the gospel was given. It consists not in separating the doctrines from the precepts of religion, nor in detaching the privileges of a Christian from his duties, and directing the attention chiefly to the one, while the other is thrown into the shade and overlooked : for this is to mutilate

late the word of God and to destroy its power by dissolving the vital union of its parts—To preach the gospel is to declare, in just order and connection, the whole counsel of heaven for our salvation, and to declare it always with a direct reference to the great purpose for which it was revealed, the moral improvement of the human race. It is to teach the people righteousness, and through a display of the perfections and works and ways of God, as manifested in Christ Jesus, to build them up in holiness and comfort to eternal life. This, as we learn from the verses which follow the text, was the sense in which the Apostle Paul interpreted the words of his commission, and on which he acted through the course of his ministry. *Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision; but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for Repentance.*

Viewed in this practical light the christian revelation presents to us a most beneficent system of religious truth, which will find

find an advocate in the heart of every good man, and which will be for ever invulnerable to the attacks of the infidel. It is the power of God to salvation, and *mighty through him to pull down strong holds, to cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* Let us therefore, my brethren, yield our understandings and our hearts to its influence. Let us receive it in all things as the guide of our conduct. Let us be not only hearers of the word, but doers of the work; and we shall be blessed in our deed. Amen.

SERMON XVI.

(Preached at the celebration of the Sacrament of
the Lord's Supper.)

LUKE, xxiii, 46.

—And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice,
he said, Father, into thy hand I commend my
spirit, and having said thus, he gave up the
Ghost.

THE death of Christ is the most wonder-
ful event which past ages have presented
to the view of mankind, and sufficient
means have been employed to rouse their
attention to it. Intimation of it had been
given in various forms even from the
beginning of the world: signs in heaven
and signs on earth announced to the uni-
verse the hour of its completion: and
through all succeeding times, the memory
of it has been cherished by the most affec-
tionate gratitude of christians. This day,
my brethren, we have met in holy convo-
cation, to shew it forth as the foundation
of

of all our hopes ; and therefore, as a preparation for the solemn service, I shall direct your thoughts to some views of it, which, through the blessing of God, may tend to excite within us the sentiments which become our situation.

The death of Jesus, being the great point in which all the doctrines and consolations of the gospel meet, as in a common center, opens before us a wide field of various and instructive meditation. At present, however, we shall survey only a few of the more striking and obvious particulars.

I. Then, the death of Jesus was on his part a voluntary offering. *No man, said he, taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself, I have power to lay it down, and power to take it again.*

When we look back to the last days of the life of Jesus on earth, we see abundant evidence that he fell not in consequence of any irresistible power of his enemies, but by his own free and unconstrained choice. Not to mention the legions of angels who were ready to descend for
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his protection, nor the miraculous powers by which he could have chained the efforts of his persecutors, we need only consider his natural means of defence, to be convinced that when *Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and people of Israel, were gathered together against him*, they did nothing but what, with his own counsel and consent, had been before determined should be done.

Before he left his retirements in the mountains of Judea, he had foretold to his disciples *that he must suffer many things of the Elders, and chief Priests, and Scribes, and be killed*. And on the road to his last pass-over, he prepares them, by a minute description of his approaching sentence and execution, for the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. Yet in full view of the sufferings that await him, uncom-pelled by external force, and careless of his safety, he relinquishes the security of his retreat, and advances boldly to fulfill the will of his Father.

When he reached Jerusalem, he found that city divided by hostile and discontented factions; its rulers trembling at every
breath

breath of insurrection; and its people prepared, by the fame of his miracles, to hail him as their promised Deliverer and King. He knew the designs which had been formed in secret against his life, the plan contrived for executing them, the traitor by whom he was to be betrayed, and the time and place appointed for his apprehension. With the knowledge of all these circumstances, how easy would it have been for an artful man actuated by ambitious motives, and desirous to protract his life, to have eluded or confounded the devices of his adversaries? How easy was it, by flattering one of the factions to have created to himself, as the Apostle Paul did afterwards, powerful and effectual support? How easy, by flattering the people, or even by yielding to their prejudices, to have placed himself at the head of a party sufficient to intimidate and overawe the disunited party of his enemies? If these measures had failed, how easy was it still, by removing the traitor from his counsels, by withdrawing to some private retreat, or by concealing himself, during the public confusion, among the croud of strangers whom

the passover had assembled at Jerusalem, to have eluded the pursuit of those who sought his life, and to have reserved himself for the chance of better times! But instead of adopting any of these expedients, Jesus holds on his determined course in peace, regardless of his enemies, and unterrified by the awful scene before him. *He had a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened till it should be accomplished.* When therefore the hour approached, in which he should depart out of this world to the Father, he goes forth resolutely to meet his fate; delivers himself, without a struggle, to the guard sent to apprehend him; refuses to defend himself from the contradictory charges brought against him on his trial, or to improve the favourable opinion of his hesitating Judge; receives, unmoved, the sentence of crucifixion; and, having finished on the cross his work of expiation, in testimony that his vital powers were still entire, *he cried with a loud voice; and commending his spirit into the hands of his Father, he gave up the ghost.*

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It appears therefore that the sufferings and death of Jesus were on his part voluntary and uncompelled. This quality was necessary to give to them their dignity and value. Without it they could have been no proofs of benevolent affection, and could have had no merit in the sight either of God or men. They might still indeed have been regarded as misfortunes, fitted to excite our sympathy; but they would not have been acts of virtue, no expiation for iniquity, and no just foundation for our confidence and gratitude. It was this quality, therefore, which constituted their genuine worth, and which enters as an essential consideration into all the important ends which they serve. Keeping these ends in view, we proceed to consider,

II. That Jesus died to convince the world that his doctrines are true, and that he was in fact the Messiah promised to the fathers.

To this conviction the death of Jesus contributed in various ways. The great fact itself, and all the minute circumstances which attended it, coincide so exactly with

the predictions of ancient prophecy, that we cannot fail to recognise in them the characters of the promised Saviour of the nations. When we see him *led from prison and from judgment, defamed and oppressed, yet opening not his mouth; giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hiding not his face from shame:* when we see his judges *numbering him with transgressors, the soldiers casting lots for his vesture, and the people presenting to him the cup of vinegar to drink:* when we see him lifted up from the earth, and the heavens blackening around him; and hear his voice exclaiming, through the darkness, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!*—what man is there who, on recollecting the Jewish oracles, does not feel and say, Verily this is He to whom Moses and all the prophets bear witness, the Sent of God, whose testimony concerning all things must be true.

If, on the other hand, we turn our view to the consequences of this event, we see in it the necessary preparation for a still more irresistible proof of his divinity. He died to rise again, and established, in the combination

nation of these two facts, a firm foundation for the faith of his followers, which the gates of hell shall never be able to remove. The humiliation of his death was, besides, a visible demonstration of what he so often told them, that his kingdom was not to be of this world. Whether, therefore, we look forward or backward from the death of Jesus, or consider it by itself, we find it connected inseparably with the great bulwarks of the Christian cause, and forming an essential link in that chain of evidence which demonstrates the authority of its author.

But independently of these collateral considerations, the circumstances of our Saviour's sufferings and death form a direct argument for the truth of his doctrines, by proving the soundness of his mind, and the purity of his intentions. Had the publication of these doctrines been accompanied with irregular, unsteady, ostentatious, passionate conduct, they might perhaps have been ascribed to those boilings of the imagination which can convert into realities the wayward fictions of the brain. Had he taught them only to the listening multitudes on the peaceful shores of Tiberias, we

might have had some pretence for doubting his sincerity. Or had they tended merely to display and magnify himself, we might, while he continued in the road to greatness, have suspected his ambition, and distrusted whatever tended to promote it. But which of these charges will you bring against the humble, afflicted, crucified Jesus? Of fanatical delusions he is acquitted by the uniform, steady tenor of his life, and especially by the calm serenity of his mind in those ruffling moments of his fate which exposed him to the peculiar influence of the passions. Of his sincerity the whole history of his death is the most unquestionable confirmation. The same doctrines which he had taught to the multitude who sought to make him a King, he taught to the judge in his trial, and to the people at his crucifixion. On account of these doctrines, and on their account alone, he suffered and died. Maintaining to the last the character he had assumed, he vindicated on the cross the purity of his views, and died proclaiming to the world that he was a teacher sent from God. The earth shook in attestation of his truth; and the centurion, wondering at the things

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things he saw, interpreted them aright when he said, *Certainly this was a righteous Man, truly this was the Son of God.*

III. Jesus died to give his followers an example of sublime and stedfast virtue.

The whole course of his life had been a pattern of the most spotless integrity. At the close of it, he could look back with confidence on the career he had finished, and appeal to his friends and to his enemies,—*Which of you convinceth me of sin?* The history of his trial in particular is a splendid monument to the purity of his character. Behold the perplexity of his persecutors when they try to discover materials of accusation against him. *They sought for witnesses to put him to death; but they found none whose witness could agree together.* Hear his judge, with all his indifference for truth, and desire to please the Jewish rulers, repeatedly declaring, *Why, what evil hath this man done? I find no fault in him.* See his betrayer, he who for years had been his disciple, and acquainted with all the secrets of his heart and life, see him torn with remorse, throwing down the wages of iniquity, wring-

ing his hands in anguish, making the doleful confession, *I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood*, and going forth to execute on himself the punishment of his treachery. See the skies cloathed in blackness, as if bemoaning his unmerited fate, and the grave itself refusing to detain him in captivity—Behold these things, and you will be satisfied that Jesus had *done no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*.

But Jesus was not only an example of the negative perfections of purity and innocence; his sufferings exhibit him on a theatre which called for a display of far nobler, and more dignified virtues than the human imagination had hitherto been able to conceive. What submission to the divine will! What patience under affliction! What fortitude in danger! What tenderness to his friends! What forbearance with his enemies! What unconquerable love to mankind! Follow him into the garden of Gethsemane, and see him bearing the load of his Father's wrath; with a frail body shaken at every joint through unutterable anguish; but preserving a firm unbroken mind, resolving to discharge his duty, and
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in contemplation of the awful scene before him, saying, with eyes raised to heaven, *Father, not my will, but thine be done. The cup which thou hast given me shall I not drink it?* Follow him from the spot where he was betrayed by a kiss, into the palace of the High Priest, into the court of Herod, and the hall of judgment; and mark, amid the most intolerable provocations, the mild uncomplaining serenity of his behaviour. Follow him to the mount of crucifixion—hear by the way his affectionate admonition to the multitudes that accompanied him—and see, even amid the cruel agonies of death, the melting tenderness with which he commits his mother to the disciple whom he loved; the soothing gentleness with which he comforts the penitent malefactor by his side; the dignity of his forgiveness to those who insulted him; the triumph of his departure when he beheld his work finished, and salvation purchased for the fallen. Who that has any taste for excellence does not feel his heart elevated, and warmed, and melted by the virtues which these scenes display? The affectionate remembrance of them formed a powerful support to the courage

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rage of his immediate followers, when called like him to sacrifice their lives in the public cause. It animated in succeeding times that glorious band of martyrs whose unshaken constancy overawed the minds even of their persecutors, and contributed more perhaps than any other human cause to extend the kingdom of their Master. It ought still to communicate a noble elevation to the mind of every true Christian, and teach him how to suffer and to die. For the virtues of Jesus were recorded for our instruction, and are proposed to us as models for our conduct ; *he suffered for us to leave us an example that we should follow his steps.*

IV. The death of Christ was an expiation for the sins of men.

On this point the declarations of scripture are numerous and explicit. *He who knew no sin, is said to have been made sin for us, to have given his life a ransom for all, to have redeemed us by his blood, to have borne the chastisement of our peace, and to have appeared in the end of the world to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.* These and many similar expressions lead us irresistibly to regard

gard the death of Christ in the light of a proper atonement for iniquity.

Though this method of removing guilt be connected with mysteries in the economy of Providence which we cannot explain; yet the belief of it certainly has some foundation in the principles of human nature and has accordingly been universally adopted. Among all the tribes of our race, however much they may differ in other respects, we meet with the altar, the victim, and the deep-rooted conviction that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission. Impressed with this belief, the trembling worshipper, before he ventured to approach his God, prepared the costly sacrifice as an expiation for his guilt, and hoped through it to obtain the forgiveness of his sins.

But the grounds on which this hope rested could not, in his case, stand the test of rational investigation. There was no sufficient relation between the victim and the person in whose room it was substituted; and its blood bore no proportion in point of value to the pardon which it was to purchase. In itself therefore it could be no expiation

piation for sin. But it served to prepare the minds of men for that greater sacrifice which Christ was to offer for iniquity, when *entering with his own blood into the holy place, he obtained eternal redemption for his people.* In this blood there was virtue of infinite value. It was besides the price which God himself had agreed to accept for transgressions. From the Cross as from a high Altar it flowed in all directions, as balm for the healing of the nations; and reaches in its efficacy to all the penitent of every age and of every land.

From this atonement inestimable blessings spring. It overthrew at once the altars that were red and noisome with the blood of slaughter. It superseded all that expensive service of offerings under which both Jews and Gentiles groaned. It restored peace to the troubled conscience of the penitent. And by an awful example it demonstrated the malignity of guilt, and taught a lesson of virtue to the whole intelligent children of God.

These were the immediate effects of this great atonement; but beside these, how comfortable and reviving are the collateral truths

truths which it suggests ! What a delightful representation does it give us of God, and of the relation in which we stand to him ! By his death on the cross, Jesus proclaims aloud to the nations that God is no stern inexorable Judge ; but placable, full of mercy, full of patience, full of grace to his feeble sinful creatures : that he is love itself, and counts nothing too dear, not even the death of his well-beloved son, for promoting our happiness and salvation : that he requires of us no hard unreasonable service, no gifts, nor penances, nor vows ; but pleasing returns of gratitude and love : that mansions of rest in his immediate presence are prepared for the good ; and that if we reject not his grace, we shall be permitted to dwell with him for ever.

What sources of consolation thus open to the pious soul ? Light flows in upon the darkness of our present condition. Confidence takes the place of those terrors which the thought of sin, and death, and futurity inspired ; because we know that God is reconciled ; that he wishes not the destruction but the salvation of the sinner ; that he bears to us the heart of a father ; and that
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since he spared not his own Son, but gave him up unto death for us, he will with him give whatever is necessary for our good. The mysterious veil that covered the ways of Providence drops from before us. We see order amid the apparent confusions of the moral system. We see wisdom in the trials of human obedience; and we can follow with confidence the voice that calls us to virtue and immortality, because we know that strength from above is purchased to support our weakness, and that our labour will not be in vain in the Lord. Inspired by these hopes we hold on our righteous way rejoicing. And when we reach the termination of our appointed course, we can enter unappalled the valley of darkness, assured that there are no spectres there to disturb our rest; that our Redeemer hallowed the grave for the reception of his friends, when *through death he destroyed him that had the power of death*; that he now lives in testimony of his victory, and that he is able to keep that which we commit to him till the day of our complete redemption.

Such

Such, Christians, are some of the most important views which the scripture has given us of the death of Jesus—views which are naturally fitted to warm our hearts with gratitude for his goodness, and to confirm us in the obedience of his law. The blessings which result from it are inestimably great—deliverance from the power, and guilt, and misery of sin; peace with God and with our selves; comfort in the discharge of our duty; hope in the hour of death; and an immortal kingdom in the heavens. These blessings were purchased for us, at the expence of his life, by a divine person who lay under no obligation to us, who stepped forward voluntarily to our support, who declined no sacrifice that was necessary to accomplish his purpose, and who had nothing to expect from us in return. In these circumstances how should our hearts burn within us when we recal to remembrance the sorrows of his cross! What gratitude should rise within us to God, the deviser of this beneficent plan of mercy! What love to Jesus who suffered so much in its execution! What detestation of ourselves whose guilt rendered these sufferings necessary! O that
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our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears, that we might weep day and night for the stain of our iniquity ! O that tears of compunction would wash away the impure affections which have hitherto separated us from our Redeemer ! O that gratitude would bind us to him for ever, and preserve us from wounding him afresh by the repetition of our sins ! For this generous Benefactor, who loves us with an everlasting love, asks nothing from us but that we crucify him no more. His whole soul is bent on our salvation ; the laws which he prescribes to direct our conduct, are but the means of promoting his benevolent purpose ; and his spirit is grieved, when, by transgressing them, we counteract it. Let our gratitude, therefore, to the Redeemer, animate our obedience. Let it restrain us from the pollutions and the provocations of vice. Let it draw us to the resemblance of his character, and constrain us by a sweet, though irresistible power, to live no longer to ourselves, but unto him who loved us and gave himself for us.

But the contemplation of our Saviour's death exhibits still other motives to confirm

us in obedience. The hour in which he fell was an hour of terror, as well as an hour of love. Offended by iniquity, the Most High had risen on his throne: his right hand, red with vengeance, was lifted up to strike; and when the sword descended on the head of his beloved Son, all nature trembled in dismay. *There was darkness over the land, the rocks were rent, the veil of the temple was divided in the midst, the earth quaked, the people smote upon their breasts and returned.* These were the awful signs of wrath, and though that wrath be averted in mercy from the penitent, it is still reserved in all its horrors for the hardened worker of iniquity. For him *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation to devour the adversaries.* Let the prospect of this indignation operate on our minds; and mingle its influence with the gentler and more attractive influence of love, that we may abstain from all iniquity, and *perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.* To cherish these sentiments, let us approach with reverence to the holy table of commemoration, and open our minds to the contemplations

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which

which it suggests. From them let us endeavour to catch a portion of that sublime steadfast virtue which enabled our Redeemer to triumph over temptation, and to *keep himself unspotted from the world*. Thus, in us, *he will see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied*. He will give his angels charge concerning us to keep us from falling; he will cheer our death-bed with the consolations of his grace; he will cause our flesh to rest in hope in the silence of the grave; and when the shadow of death shall be changed into the morning, he will receive us into the everlasting kingdom of our Father. *For to this end he both died, and rose and revived, that he might be Lord of the dead and of the living. Unto him therefore who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God and our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

SERMON XVII.

I PETER I, 12.

—Which things the angels desire to look into.

WE learn from revelation that the universe of God contains various orders of spiritual creatures far superior to man in wisdom and power. The different gradations of these invisible beings, are marked in scripture by different designations; but they are most commonly expressed by the general name of angels. They are described as ministers employed by the Almighty in conducting the operations of Providence. They stand before his face beholding his glory. *They excel in strength and do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.*

These exalted spirits seem to take a peculiar interest in the concerns of this lower world. They sang for joy when the foundations of it were laid ; they watch now with the most benevolent regard for the good of its inhabitants ; and when its end shall come, they will sound the last trumpet, and prepare the sons of men for judgment. They are represented, especially, as delighting in the gracious plan of our redemption ; and they have been frequently employed in promoting it. One of them announced to Mary the coming of the Messiah ; a multitude of them appeared by night in the plains of Bethlehem, celebrating in songs the glad hour of his birth ; in various exigencies of his life they ministered to his consolation ; they waited on him both when he rose from the dead, and when he ascended on high ; they contributed their assistance to his apostles in spreading his religion over the earth ; they still minister for those who are the heirs of salvation ; and when the mystery of God shall be finished, they will come, as the retinue of our Redeemer, to gather together his elect from the four winds of heaven, and to conduct them

them in triumph to the everlasting habitation of their Father.

These glorious beings the text accordingly exhibits as enquiring diligently into that salvation, which *had been revealed to the prophets and preached by the apostles with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*. In the original language, the expression of *their desire to look into it* is much stronger than in our version. By a beautiful allusion to the position of the cherubim who overshadowed the Ark of the covenant, where the oracles of grace were deposited, the angels are represented as bending down to pry into its contents, and to *search out the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*.—Even to them who had no direct interest in the event, these subjects furnished materials of attractive and improving meditation. How delightful then ought the consideration of them to be to us, who derive from them all our hopes of happiness and perfection!—To kindle within us the affection that is due for the blessings of redemption, it may be useful to unfold the motives which rendered them objects of such close attention to the spirits

of heaven. Of the principles by which these spirits are actuated, we can judge only from what we experience to be fitted to move ourselves; and therefore every circumstance, which we can conceive as an inducement for them to study the merciful plans of providence towards the human race, should operate with tenfold force in recommending that interesting subject to the attention and pursuit of man.

1. Then, the angels may have been induced to search into the mysteries of redemption from a natural desire of encreasing their knowledge.

This desire is implanted by God in the breast of his intelligent creatures to prompt them to a due exercise of the talents which he has committed to them. We have reason to believe that it forms an essential part in the character of angels as well as in our own. Though beings of a superior order, yet, like us, they are of limited capacity; they receive their information by gradual additions; and they are ignorant of many things, which, if more fully known, would tend to illustrate the perfections

tions of him whom they adore. His works and ways therefore are subjects of their earnest contemplation ; and from every discovery which they make, there arises a new theme of admiration and praise.

To beings of this description, the method of reclaiming and saving sinners opened a fresh and delightful field of contemplation. In many of its features, it could bear no resemblance to any thing that had yet been seen ; and it was difficult to conceive how it could be accomplished in consistency with the holiness of God, with the honour of his government, with the sentence of death that had been so solemnly pronounced, and with the appointment of a flaming sword *turning every way to keep the way to the tree of life*. To solve these difficulties had probably often exercised their thoughts. And when they felt themselves unequal to the task, they beheld the Almighty himself stepping forward to accomplish what they had relinquished in despair. *When he saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor, his own arm brought salvation to him, and his righteousness, it sustained him.*

him. In these circumstances, their curiosity could not fail to be keenly excited to watch events as they arose, that through them they might discover the particulars of this new manifestation of the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty.

It is reasonable to believe that their curiosity on this point was powerfully stimulated by the gradual and partial manner in which the purpose of heaven was unfolded. From the beginning they had heard the promises made to the fathers; they were witnesses of the preparations by which the object of them was to be finally accomplished; and some of them had even been sent to support the hopes of mankind by magnificent, though dark annunciations of a time *determined on the holy city to finish transgression, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.* These gradual openings of the plan of Providence could scarcely fail to awaken their attention. And hence, when the predicted period approached in which Messiah the prince was to be cut off, it was natural for them to anticipate a scene of wonders,
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and to look with earnest expectation for the full vision of the glory that remained to be revealed.

But still, their desire of knowledge was not fully satisfied. Even after the Son of righteousness arose and poured his light on the nations, there remained obscurities in the plan of redemption sufficient to attract the attention of the most exalted seraph. There was still a book, sealed with seven seals, which, except the lion of the tribe of Juda, none in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth, was able to open or to read, or to look thereon. It contains the events that are still to spring up for completing the work of grace—the prophecies that are still to be fulfilled—in the propagation of the gospel, in the fall of antichrist, in the general peace of the world, in the return of the Jews to their native land, in the resurrection of the dead, in the coming of Christ to judge the world, in the glorifying of his saints, in the destruction of his enemies, and the final delivery of the kingdom to the Father, that when he shall have put down all rule
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and all authority and power, God may be all in all.

All these are events which the wisdom of our Father has revealed but imperfectly. They cannot be known fully till after they shall have come to pass ; and the darkness, which now covers them from the faithful on earth, must to a certain degree veil them also from the eye of angels. The light that is let in upon them is sufficient to rouse, but not to gratify curiosity, and to draw from the pious mind the tender exclamation, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !*

But it is not only the novelty exhibited in the work of redemption which prompts the investigation of angels : this work opens to their view,

2. A series of the most sublime and affecting objects of contemplation.

Objects that are great and sublime have still stronger attractions for generous minds than objects that are new. By the ennobling and rapturous delight, which they convey to the heart, they seize upon the attention

tention, and compel us to give our thoughts to them.

Now, what subject can be compared, in this respect, with the glorious scheme devised by God for the restoration of the human race? Whether we consider its origin, the agents employed in conducting it, the events which it comprehends, or the consequences that flow from it, we perceive the most wonderful displays of divine perfection.

By the fall of man a whole class of intelligent beings seemed degraded and ruined for ever: the world that had been formed for their reception had become a noxious waste: sin and death and everlasting darkness seemed to have taken possession of the spot which the Almighty had blessed, and destined for the happy abode of innocence and beauty. While angels, with anxious forebodings, beheld these signs of desolation; while they bewailed the dishonour that had been cast on the character of their Father; while they looked forward with trembling to the final execution of his vengeance, and saw no method of appeasing it, —they heard the voice of the Eternal, in accents of sweetest melody, proclaiming,
Deliver

Deliver them from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom. They heard, in the counsels of peace, the Son of the Most High, accepting the proffered terms of redemption, and saying, *Lo! I come; in the volume of thy book, it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God!* They saw him cloathed in the ensigns of a mediatorial kingdom, going forth to inspire the fallen with hope, to rule in the midst of his enemies, and to make his people willing in the day of his power. They beheld, through the visions of prophecy, a new order of things arising on earth, light shining through the darkness of human passions, the revolutions of empire and of art arranging themselves in subordination to the plan of Grace, and the arm of their Prince, by invisible springs, bending the whole course of events to prepare the way before it. At last, when the fulness of time was come, they beheld this Lord of heaven descending to earth, assuming the human nature into personal union with the divine, exhibiting an example of spotless virtue, fixing the foundations of a spiritual empire, laying down his life as an atonement for transgression, rising triumphant
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from the dead as the first fruits of the new creation, ascending to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, and sending down the Holy Ghost to complete the work of salvation.

To minds capable of estimating their value, these are in themselves splendid objects of contemplation. And how magnificent are the collateral views connected with them! If we look to the transactions of Jesus on the earth, and consider the motives which led to them, what a glorious display do they open to us of the divine perfections! What benevolence, and wisdom, and power appear in the contrivance and execution of the scheme to which they are subservient! How have mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other! If we turn our eye forward to their consequences, what a glorious sight opens to our view! We see the noble fabric, which sin had ruined, appearing again in renovated beauty; the kingdom of God re-established among men; the altars of superstition and idolatry overthrown; immortality restored to the faithful; the spirit of Christ aiding their endeavours to become perfect; the
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gate of heaven opened to receive them; eternal happiness provided for them in the presence of their Father. Nay! we see even other classes of intelligent beings participating in the benignant influence—Angels themselves deriving from it new motives to obedience, and the peaceful dominion of righteousness settled on firmer foundations through unnumbered worlds.—These are the most sublime subjects that can be presented to the moral eye. And can we then wonder that the spirits above should feel themselves attracted by them; that angels should desire to look into them; and that, sympathizing with the joys of the redeemed, they should, on their account, ascribe dominion, and blessing, and praise to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever?

But the plan of redemption has still stronger attractions for these blessed spirits, than either the novelty or the grandeur of the objects which it presents to them. For,

3. It coincides in all its parts with their best affections, and gives an immediate gratification to the warmest desires of their hearts.

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What are the affections which, we have reason to believe, burn with the brightest ardour in these celestial minds? Are they not love to God, zeal for the honour of his government, and active benevolence towards those whom he has chosen to be *heirs of the promises*? And where can objects be found so well fitted to attract and satisfy these affections, as in the discoveries made by the gospel?

We have already seen that the manifestations of grace and truth which the gospel reveals, shed a new and glorious light on the character of the Almighty. They reconcile to our view the more awful attributes of his nature with the exercise of mercy to the fallen, and prove him to be just even when he justifies the ungodly. Now every addition to his glory—every ray reflected on him from the face of Jesus must add to the love which angels bear towards him. It enhances their admiration of his excellence; and must contribute, at the same time, to render them more sensible of the happiness of being admitted to dwell in so glorious a presence. In this respect, therefore, self-interest concurs with the more generous

nerous principles of divine love, in rousing their attention, and in prompting them to enquire diligently into the mysteries of redemption.

But to their joy in God, they join the most earnest desire to see his moral kingdom extended through all orders of intelligent creatures. Holy themselves, they dwell in the holy place as ministers of the Most High, and must delight in whatever tends to facilitate the great object of all their labours, the increase of universal righteousness. With what rapture, then, must they contemplate a plan which has this object directly in view; and which, by its doctrines, its examples, its precepts, its promises, and its aids, is most admirably fitted to attain it! They see all its parts inscribed with holiness to the Lord, and tending, by direct consequence, to bring forward the predicted periods for which they wait, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. As they meditate on the provisions which it has made for this end, they feel warmer hopes glowing in their bosom, and with ecstasy anticipate the blissful day, when, with the elders
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around the throne, falling on their faces and worshipping God, they shall say, *We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.*

If to these considerations we add the compassion and kindness which the angelic tribes entertain for fallen man, we shall be abundantly satisfied that the study of the blessings of redemption must be to them a source of ineffable joy. Not only the benevolence of their nature, but the official relations which they bear to us give them a warm interest in our happiness. They are represented in scripture as forming with us but one family, and as ministring spirits sent forth to minister for our salvation. They encamp round about the good man and deliver him. They have it in charge to bear him up in their hands through the dangers of this world, and when he has completed his appointed term, they carry his soul into the bosom of Abraham. To beings like these how glad must have been the first prospect of our restoration! How joyful the sight of its progress towards perfection!

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fection ! How reviving the voice which they heard in the synagogue of Capernaum, when Jesus rose and proclaimed, "*The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty those that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord :* How transporting the sound which, by his ministry, has gone into all lands—*That though the wages of sin is death, yet the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord :—And that now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. If there be joy among the angels of God, even over one sinner that repenteth, what must be their rapture when, in the visions of revelation, they behold those millions of the redeemed who shall come out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven !*

The plan of Providence for the deliverance of our race, then, has manifold attractions for the study of angels. They feel that great is the mystery of godliness, and irresistible the motives which determine them

them to pry into it. Every new discovery respecting it discloses to them new sources of admiration and triumph. Increasing delights animate their exertions to proceed; and when they reach the conclusion—when they penetrate into its whole extent, and behold the certainty of its consummation, they stand enraptured at the sight of so much grace and wisdom, and burst forth into one universal song of joy, *Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.*

From the deep interest which angels take in the plan for our redemption, it is an obvious inference that it must have a just claim to our closest investigation and regard. If these celestial spirits, who stand in no need of a Redeemer for themselves, find in it sufficient motives to arrest their attention, what attractions ought it to have for us who are its immediate objects, and indebted to it for the continuance of our existence, and for all the comforts and hopes by which that existence is blessed? We feel delight in contemplating the wonders of the material universe, and the

connexions by which its parts are united—in counting the number, and ascertaining the movements of the radiant orbs that roll on high. And such contemplations are worthy of our nature. They inspire a rational satisfaction ; they are productive of temporal utility ; they exalt our conceptions of the great Creator. But by a well regulated mind, they cannot surely be compared, either in utility or interest, with that knowledge of the only true God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, which makes us wise unto salvation. How unreasonable and absurd then is the contempt so often shewn by the men of the world for the means of enlightening them with the knowledge of divine truth, and of warming them with the love of it ! Can such contempt for what even angels admire, indicate any thing but some woeful defect, both in the understanding and the heart of the weak, presumptuous mortal who indulges it ? For such contempt is not only unreasonable and absurd, but highly pernicious. It undermines the very foundations of that hope which is essential to human improvement. By veiling from our view the obligations under which we lie

lie to God, it relaxes our zeal in the practice of duty, weakens all the motives to obedience, and in too many instances renders the profession of Christianity a mere *form* of godliness without its *power*.

Let us therefore, Christians, beware of this chilling and criminal indifference. Let us study to know the doctrines of our holy faith, and let that knowledge produce its due influence on our hearts, and on our conduct. The possession of it is a source of manifold delights : it will fortify us against the temptations of the world ; it will qualify us on earth for an enlightened and affectionate remembrance of our Saviour's sufferings ; and prepare us at last for joining the triumphant hymn of the redeemed, —Salvation unto our God, and to the Lamb that was slain ! For he hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, and made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. He has now entered into his glory. He sits above on his throne of power, and we will serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him for ever. Amen.

SERMON XVIII.

MATTHEW, XXIII, 9.

*—Call no man your Father upon the earth ;
for One is your Father which is in heaven.*

THE representations which the scriptures give of God, though highly sublime, are admirably suited to the present imperfect condition of our being. While they impress on our hearts those sentiments of reverence and awe which become the feeble dependent subjects of his government, they are fitted at the same time to encourage our confidence, and to bind us to his service by the strongest cords of affection. They present to us that great and mighty Lord, whose voice is the thunder, and whom the heavens and the earth obey, as full of tenderness and compassion, the raiser of the fallen,

fallen, the reviver of the disconsolate, the judge of the widow and of the fatherless in his holy habitation.

Of all the views that can be given of the divine character, none is more interesting and instructive than that which the text suggests. The name of Father brings up at once before the mind whatever can inspire respect, and confidence, and love: and God is our Father in a far higher and more endearing sense than the parents whom we acknowledge upon earth. In comparison with him, they even lose their title to this affectionate appellation; for One only is our Father, and he is in heaven. It may therefore be a pleasing and useful exercise to contemplate the relation which, in this respect, we bear to the Almighty, and the lessons of consolation and of duty which result from it. And, as we proceed, may God himself kindle within us the feelings and affections which become the children of his family.

When we turn our thoughts towards God, and to the descriptions that are given of him, we find him possessing, in the most eminent degree, all the characters which

can confer a right to the title of Father. He gave us our being and its powers : he disposes the course of things to secure our preservation and comfort : he furnishes the means of educating us for the duties of our station : he has even redeemed us from the ruin into which we had fallen, by paying for us the demands of justice : and he has prepared for us, as soon as we shall be qualified for enjoying it, an everlasting inheritance of happiness and glory in the kingdom of the blessed.

If, in these various respects, we consider the wonderful things which God has done for us, how affecting are the proofs of his paternal regard ! He made us, and not we ourselves. Fashioning for us a body out of the common dust, adjusting its members most skilfully for mutual co-operation, and adorning it with proportions far more beautiful than are elsewhere to be seen, he breathed into it a living spirit, an image of himself, furnished with wisdom for employing the body in promoting its purposes, panting for the honours of an immortal existence, and capable of rising through endless advances to a still nearer resemblance

resemblance of the perfections of its parent. At the same time he touched it with the perception of happiness, and inspired it with all those affections and hopes which unite men to each other, and render their existence a source of improvement and delight. *Verily, O God, we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not; Thou art our Father, our Redeemer, thy Name is from everlasting.*

Nor was this noble structure produced as a mere transient display of the skill and contrivance of its great former. God still watches for the preservation of his work. He hath implanted within it the power of continuing itself, and placed it in a scene where all things are suited to its wants, and where, in due measure and proportion, they are constantly reproduced by the same wisdom which at first ordained them for the use of man. How admirably hath he adjusted to our exigencies the external circumstances of our condition! Who inspires into the parent's breast those natural affections which are so necessary to protect and rear us in our infant years? Who
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forms the light adapted to our organs of sight, which spreads before us the riches of nature, and enables us to go among them in quest of the means of subsistence? Who refresheth us with the grateful vicissitudes of days and seasons? Who endues the soil with its fertility, waters it with dew from heaven, and enables it, through culture, to increase its productions in proportion to the increasing number of those who are destined to feed on them? Who upholds around us the mighty fabric of nature, and defends its parts from the inroads of old age and decay? Who invigorates our own frame, throws off from it the unseen obstructions that are constantly threatening to destroy it, and prolongs it till we have finished our task, and become ready for our departure? All these, with a thousand other instances of beneficent concern, are the operations of the Almighty, and proofs of his providential interference to preserve the things which he has made. Though he is himself invisible, like the soul which operates within us; yet we can trace his affectionate, and never ceasing care for our good, in the inexplicable effects which

which every where co-operate in its production.

But we have not only been created by God, and are still upheld by him in possession of the talents which he bestowed upon us at our birth ; we are destined to improve in wisdom and virtue as means of happiness ; and our Father has manifested the most affectionate concern for our education in the innumerable instruments which he employs for advancing it. He has, in this respect also, accommodated our faculties so wisely to the circumstances in which we are placed, that every thing which we see or do contributes to exercise and improve them. By the relation of dependence in which he has placed us to the material objects around us, he compels us to exert our powers of observation and reasoning. Even through the instincts of the inferior animals he suggests to us valuable lessons of instruction ; and, in the various connexions with our kind, he has provided inexhaustible sources both of cultivation to our understanding, and of exercise to the best affections of our hearts. He has besides given us conscience to teach us our duty,
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and to remind us of our obligation to practise it : he confirms its admonitions by the secret whisperings of his spirit ; and, in the whole plan of his moral administration, there is a manifest tendency to discourage iniquity, to cherish within us habits of obedience to his law, and to train us for the enjoyment of a higher and more perfect state of existence. *Verily the righteous Lord loveth righteousness. He ordereth aright the steps of his children, and sheweth them the way in which they should go.*

Through all these channels a candid observer of the plan of providence may, even under the guidance of the light of nature, discover the Almighty, with a fatherly care, providing for our race the means of instruction and improvement. But when we view them in the clearer light shed on them by revelation, how unspeakably are the proofs of his paternal affection magnified to our eye ! How tender, how endearing is the character which he there sustains, grieving for the miseries of his disobedient offspring, engaged with the most solicitous concern in devising means for their restoration, sending his
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prophets in succession to encourage and reclaim them, giving even the Son of his bosom to die for their redemption, and causing all things to work together for their good! *O the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of God in Christ Jesus! It passeth knowledge.* It exercises a secret influence on all the movements of this lower world, bending them to promote the benevolent purposes of his grace. In consequence of it we are again received into his family, and see new agents co-operating with him in the scheme of our redemption—Jesus himself pursuing in heaven the work which he had commenced on earth: the Holy Ghost coming from on high to enlighten, to comfort, and to purify his saints: and angels descending as ministring spirits to the heirs of salvation. We behold a glorious inheritance prepared for us in heaven, and ready to be conferred on all whose virtuous attainments shall qualify them for enjoying it—an inheritance of happiness which shall satisfy all their desires, which shall increase as their capacities enlarge, and which shall never fade away. In a word, we behold
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the station which we now occupy, with all its changes and trials, converted by *our elder Brother* into a school of grace, to train us for the honours of our father's house ; and we look forward to a time when, as the children of his family, purified from guilt, and beautified with his likeness, we shall assemble round our father's throne, and receive from him the kingdom prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Such, Christians, are some of the grounds on which it becomes us to regard God as our Father, and which give him a better title to this endearing appellation than even the most indulgent parent on earth. He is the author and preserver of our being, and of all the comforts with which it is blessed ; he careth for us continually ; and, by a most extensive and beneficent system of education, which embraces all the incidents of our life, and in which all the persons of the God-head concur, he qualifies us for that inheritance of glory which he hath laid up in heaven, ready, at the consummation of things, to be revealed to them who are kept by his power through faith unto salvation.

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Let us next attend to some of the lessons which this view of the divine character is fitted to suggest.

i. The consideration of God as our Father naturally suggests the services of gratitude and obedience which we owe to him. What are the duties which natural affection prompts us to perform to those who bear the title of our fathers upon earth? Does it not teach us to reverence them, to pay them testimonies of respect, to submit to their authority, and to shew them that we feel ourselves to be their children by resembling them in their virtues? Do we regard such proofs of affection in their case as so justly due, that no man can neglect them without bringing an indelible reproach on his character? And can we then suppose that similar services of love are not due from us to the Father of our spirits? The glorious perfections of his nature are fitted to impress us with sentiments of admiration and dread: his omniscience can awe within us the rising powers of corruption: and his omnipotence compel us to obedience. But he chooses rather to suggest our obligations through the relations of affection which
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he bears to us. *A Son*, saith he, *honoureth his Father and a servant his master : if then I be a father, where is mine honour ? and if I be a master, where is my fear ? Why is my name despised ? Do ye thus requite the Lord, O people foolish and unwise ? Is he not thy Father that bought thee ? Hath he not made thee and established thee ?*—Let us therefore, Christians, listen to the paternal voice which speaketh to us from heaven ; and let us give unto God the glory that is due unto him. Let no office of piety that can testify our reverence for him be left unperformed. Let us especially be followers of him as dear children, exhibiting in our conduct the resemblance which we bear to him, and striving to become perfect as he is perfect, that being blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, we may shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Having this hope, let us act worthily of our descent, and purify ourselves even as our Father is pure. And though it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; yet we know that when he shall appear, he will acknowledge us as his children ; that we shall

shall be like him ; and that we shall see him as he is.

2. The consideration of God as our Father should teach us the duty which we owe to all his sensitive creatures, and especially to our fellow men. Manifold are our obligations to be just and beneficent towards all who enjoy the gift of life. But of these obligations, none is more interesting and powerful than that which results from their being members with us of one family, which has a common head, who feels a concern in them all, and who must regard as a contempt of his paternal authority, and as an injury to himself, every act of injustice or neglect that may be done to the meanest of his children. How strongly should this consideration bind us to those, especially, who possess the same nature with ourselves ! On the whole race he has stamped the peculiar marks of a common brotherhood. He has planted within us all the same powers and principles of action : he has given us the same interests to pursue : he has linked us together by many tender ties of affection, and rendered our mutual aid necessary both to the comfort and success of our labours

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bours. He has even redeemed us by a common Saviour, through whom he commands us to be kindly affectioned one to another; and invites us to look forward at last to mansions of rest in one glorious abode, where the whole family of heaven and earth shall be united for ever in the presence of their Father—How then, Christians, can we now forget the relation in which we stand to our fellow men, or violate the obligations which result from it! Hatred, and strife, and slander, and every malevolent affection, disturb the peace of God's family, and render the man who indulges them unworthy of a place in it. Let us, therefore, put them far from us. Remembering how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, let us give to all their due. Let us shun oppression and violence. *Let us love even our enemies, bless them that curse us, and pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us, that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven.* Thus, even in this distant land, shall we experience the smile of his approbation, and rise gradually, through the exercise of kind affection, to that blessed society who inhabit
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the city of the living God, even to an innumerable company of angels, and to the general assembly and church of the First Born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Many other improving lessons naturally result from the consideration that God is our Father. But I shall only mention farther,

3. The consolation which it furnishes amid all the changes and afflictions of life.

In this world we must meet with tribulation. Mutability is the condition of all sublunary things. We see around us, in the fortunes of men, incessant changes from wealth to poverty, from elevation to abasement, from joy to sorrow, from health to sickness, from life to death. Amid these incessant revolutions, who shall secure us, for one day, in possession of the blessings which we now enjoy? Who can prevent what is mutable from changing, what is corruptible from wasting, what was lent only for a season from departing, what is mortal from dying? No, my brethren, the condition of man is never at rest; and, if we had no better security for our happiness

than the permanence of outward prosperity, our state would be miserable indeed. But how reviving is the thought, that all these changes are under the direction of our Father, who is wise and beneficent, and who grieveth not willingly the children of men! Though we knew not the purposes which he serves by them, it would become us as his creatures, who having nothing but what he gives, to submit to his appointments, and to consent that he should *do what he wills with his own*. But knowing that all events are designed for good; that even affliction is intended to profit those who are exercised by it—to open their eyes to the malignity of sin, to furnish materials for the exercise of their sympathetic affections, to confirm their fortitude, and to prepare them for quitting a scene in which they are not destined to dwell—how cheerfully should we receive even the hardest trials of life! Though they come in an ambiguous form, are they not blessings from our Father's hand, and essential parts in that wise system of means by which he reclaims us from corruption, and educates us for future glory? These, Christians, are delightful

lightful views of the plan of providence. Supported by the hopes which they give, the good man, who performs his duty, can look at the threatenings of the storm, and see nothing in it to alarm him. Amid all the changes that happen, he maintains his confidence in God ; and when at last nature decays, and he feels within him the symptoms of approaching dissolution, undismayed at the prospect, he resigns his spirit into the hands of his Father, hailing the day which terminates the toils of his education, and puts him in possession of the promised inheritance.

Let us, my brethren, by a patient continuance in well-doing, labour assiduously that in the hour of affliction, and at the end of our pilgrimage, these consolations may be ours. And to the one God, the Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all—to Him be praise, and honour, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON XIX.

(Preached in the High Church of Edinburgh 4th January 1801, being the first Sunday after the interment of the Rev. Dr Blair.)

HEB. VI, 11, 12.

—And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.

THE great distinguishing character of christianity consists in the intimate relation which all its parts bear to a state of future existence. It not only announces immortality to man, but incorporates the belief of it with every thing which it presents to our attention. The whole scope of its doctrines and institutions serves to remind us perpetually that we are destined for a nobler scene of being than the present, and to prepare us for its enjoyments. If Christ died,
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it was that he might redeem his servants from death : if he rose again, it was to *beget us again to a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away* : if, at his command, we approach the waters of baptism, and *are planted together with him in the likeness of his death*, it is that we may be also *in the likeness of his resurrection* : and when, at the holy supper, we taste the memorials of his passion, they are emblems to us of *the bread of life*, and pledges of that feast of joy which is prepared for the faithful in his Father's kingdom. Even the afflictions of this mortal state are employed by Christ to raise the view of his followers to a better country—to an enduring substance in heaven ; and all the duties which he calls us to perform are enforced by the sanctions of futurity, and represented as means of qualifying us for that eternal life, which is promised to all, who, *by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality.*

In conformity with this animating view of the christian system, the Apostle, in the commencement of this chapter, exhorts the

Hebrews to go on to perfection—not to be satisfied with a wavering unproductive knowledge of the mere elementary principles of Christian doctrine, but to follow these principles, with steady conviction, through all their consequences and applications. He informs them that an imperfect, unsteady persuasion would not be able, in days of temptation and peril, to support either itself, or the virtues which should rest on it; and that, if in consequence of ill-established or defective knowledge, they once fell from their steadfastness, it would not be possible to renew them again to repentance. He therefore desires that every individual among them would shew the utmost diligence to obtain full and final certainty respecting the hope of futurity, in order that they might be no longer slothful, but *followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises.*

From these words then we may consider,

I. The means by which we may secure the happiness of a future state, and

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II. The encouragement to exertion in pursuit of it, arising from the success of those who have gone before us to the possession of the promised inheritance.

1. Let us consider the means by which the happiness of heaven may be attained. Those, who now triumph in the enjoyment of it, reached it, says the Apostle, through faith and patience. And by the same steps we may follow them to their bright abode.

The words faith and patience are here taken in their most extensive sense, as representing each a particular class of virtues. Faith describes the sound state of the understanding in the perception and application of religious truth : and patience denotes that calm and firm fortitude of heart, which enables us to resist every seduction, and, at the call of faith, to hold onward undaunted in the path which conscience prescribes. These virtues therefore comprehend whatever, in a moral view, is necessary to adorn the understanding and the heart of man, and consequently they form, by their union, the perfection of the human character.

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The term faith occurs in the New Testament under various limitations, according to the nature of the objects on which it rests, of the degrees of assent with which it embraces them, and of the ends for which it is cherished. These limitations have given rise to many controversies on this subject into which we have, at present, no occasion to enter. It is sufficient for us to know that faith usually denotes the state of mind that is experienced when we receive with conviction, and regard as realities, the interesting facts which revelation presents to us. It gives certainty and substance to the unseen objects of religious contemplation, qualifying them to impress our affections, and according to the laws of our moral nature, bending for action every congenial spring of the soul.

The objects of this faith are all the truths of religion. It embraces whatever has been made known to us concerning God, his perfections and government. In the view of the Apostle, it embraces especially, through all its parts, the greater mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh ; and that series of events through which, in the
establishment

establishment and administration of his mediatorial kingdom, he restores purity and happiness to the race of men. Following him within the veil, it fixes its eye with particular steadfastness on the powers of the world to come; and embodying before our imagination the eternal and unalterable consequences of our present conduct, it enables us to estimate accurately the true nature of this earthly state, and to determine the course which wisdom prescribes for us, in all the variety of circumstances in which we can be placed.

To this faith the scriptures ascribe the noblest attributes. They represent it as overcoming the world, as rendering men and their services pleasing to God, and as purifying them for their admission into heaven. And when we consider the nature of this principle, we cannot be surprised at the influence which is attributed to it. It is in itself a virtue of the highest order, and it supplies the motives which invigorate and secure all the other virtues of the heart.

It is a great mistake, my brethren, to suppose that we are not accountable for
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the assent of our understanding ; or that our opinions, in matters of religion, are in no degree dependent upon us ; and that therefore no blame can be due to us for the defects, or the errors of our faith. The understanding is a most valuable talent committed to us by God. It is as liable to be perverted, through our own fault, as any other talent that has been given us ; and the most common instruments of its perversion are the depraved inclinations that prevail within us. When the heart is evil, we fly from the light that would reprove us. Though the doctrines of religion be set before us, and though the evidence by which they are supported be produced along with them, yet that evidence is not irresistible. It is addressed to free agents ; and it depends upon ourselves whether we shall examine it with attention, candour and impartiality ; or with indifference and a wish to find it defective. The man who brings to this examination a fair mind, and who receives the truth in the love of it, discharges a more important duty. While on the other hand, the man, who allows himself to be biassed by improper motives ;
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who sees the object before him only through the colouring which his passions give ; who suffers prejudice, or vanity, or vice to obstruct the light of his judgment, is guilty of a gross and dangerous iniquity. He extinguishes the lamp which heaven gave him for his direction, and renders his corruption more incurable and desperate than that even of the convinced criminal ; because the very light that should have reclaimed him, he has converted into darkness.

The faith therefore which saves the sinner is not to be regarded as a charm that derives all its value from the positive ordination of Christ. It possesses an intrinsic worth. It proceeds from a virtuous state of mind ; it indicates a right use of our intellectual faculty ; and it is the foundation and support of whatever is estimable and exalted in the human character. There are good reasons, therefore, why the scriptures uniformly represent this faith as indispensable to a Christian, as the spring of his acceptableness to God, and as a most important part of his preparation for heaven.

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But in order to reach perfection, we must join to our faith patience, or that quality of the heart which fortifies us against the influence of every impression that would seduce us from our duty.

How many are there, my brethren, who feel within them the light of good principles, whose conscience marks out faithfully the course they ought to follow, and whose faith paints in vivid colouring before them all the sanctions of obedience, who yet suffer themselves to be entangled daily in the snares of sin? Though they know the danger of iniquity, they want the steadiness of character which is necessary to resist it. They suffer themselves to be hurried away by the impulse of the moment: they do the evil which they see: and even with the rocks of destruction full before them, while the powers of passion play around the heart, they follow the deceitful current of present inclination; and make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

The temptations that assail the resolution of the just are of very different kinds; and there are, no doubt, situations in which the quality here termed patience may appear
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more obviously necessary than in others to the character of a perfect man. Present interest, as well as present inclination, may rise in opposition to the dictate of duty; and we may be called to suffer much, and long in defence of our integrity. This was especially the situation of the first Christians. Both their faith, and their patience had many trials to surmount before they had their perfect work. The prejudices of education, the power of habit, the reverence for long established institutions, and the authority of learning, combined with the repugnancies of an evil heart of unbelief, to form an almost insuperable barrier against the evidence of christianity. And even after this evidence had prevailed, when light had broken in upon the mind, and the Christian convert had tasted the heavenly gift of truth, he saw before him, in embracing it, a path of terrors in which he must resist, *even unto blood, striving against sin.* In this situation fortitude the most heroic was necessary for his support. The scene in which he acted, called forth into continual exertion all the firmness of his soul. Patience, in the profession of his faith, became thus the
leading

leading feature of his character—the master virtue which regulated the movements of the rest, and determined their value.

In other situations this virtue may appear under some diversity of aspect, and shine with a milder lustre. But in all situations, it lies at the foundation of a religious character, and forms one of its essential constituents. In all situations we must have the patience that is necessary to self command. We must be able to bear unmoved the loss of temporary gratification, to suffer, without dejection, the afflictions that befall us, and to execute calmly, and in spite of all opposition, even the hardest commands of our conscience and our God. By thus possessing our souls in patience, we shall be able to hold on our way to heaven unsecluded, superior to the events of this passing state, and counting nothing, not even life itself, dear, that we may finish our course with joy.

These observations prove that faith and patience, the virtue of a pure enlightened understanding, and the virtue of a firm incorruptible heart, lie at the root of a perfect character. Did your time permit, it would be

be easy to shew how they give rise to the other graces of the Christian life by supplying the nourishment necessary for their support, and expanding themselves as circumstances require into piety, benevolence, and every other moral ornament of man. But I shall rather proceed, at present, as was proposed,

2. To consider the motives which the text suggests for recommending to us the cultivation of these virtues, as means of qualifying us for the promised inheritance.

Faith and patience, like all other blessings, descend from heaven. They are the gifts of God through Jesus Christ. But the use and improvement of them, from which alone they become blessings to us, are left dependent on ourselves. Many motives concur to excite our diligence in improving them; but there is a peculiar tenderness and force in that which is suggested by the text. Through them the saints who have gone before us, are now inheriting the promises.

This argument addresses at once our interest, our understanding, and the best affections of our heart. It raises our view to

the recompence of reward, the glorious inheritance promised to the faithful: It places before us a visible proof that the attainment of this inheritance is not beyond the reach of men like us: it warms within us the sentiment of generous emulation: and it attracts us onward by ties that are dear as life to the virtuous soul—by the love of those whom death has consecrated in our imagination, and by the ravishing prospect of re-joining them in heaven.

As this is a motive which operates powerfully on every virtuous mind, so we have innumerable means of calling it up to our view. In the path to glory, Christians, you are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses who are at once the spectators and the examples of your virtue. Look back to the saints recorded in the page of scripture, and behold their patience in suffering, their steadfastness in the cause of God, and of their country, and their triumphant opposition to all the powers of iniquity. *Time would fail me to tell of the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, out of weakness*
were

were made strong, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Look to the glorious band of martyrs, and to the innumerable multitudes who, in every succeeding age, have held fast their integrity, and, amid all the corruption of the times, have been witnesses for virtue and for God. Contemplate the ardour of their zeal, the warmth of their beneficence, the firmness of their resolution, and their invincible attachment to their duty; and you will feel a portion of their spirit rising in your bosom. For why should we despair of attaining the perfection which they have reached before us? We endure no trials to which they were not exposed, and we possess the same means of resistance and of victory. They trembled, like us, in the days of their pilgrimage: like us, they maintained a double conflict with the powers of sin: they advanced to the combat in much weakness and fear: but they resolved to conquer, and have marked with their footsteps the path in which we are called to struggle and overcome. Behold them now, all their labours past, in quiet possession of the prize, with crowns of glory on their heads, and palms of victory in
their

their hands, singing hallelujahs to him who sitteth on the throne, and to the lamb for ever and ever. Animated by this glorious prospect *lift up the hands which hang down*; meet with courage the difficulties of your trial; resolve to reach the perfection you contemplate; and let nothing seduce you from your steadfastness.

In this competition for virtuous attainment it may be often useful to bring down your eye, from contemplating the departed worthies of distant times and countries, towards patterns of imitation that are endeared to you by more tender ties. If, in the relations of life, you have had a connection,—if, in the circle of your own family, you have had a father, a husband, or a brother, who discharged with exemplary fidelity the duties of his station, whom every tongue blessed as the friend of God and man, and who died as he lived, full of faith and hope, place him before you as the model of your conduct,—conceive him bending from his seat in the skies, pleased with your attachment, deeply interested in your success, and cheering you in your labours of love. His image will be as a guardian

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dian angel, to admonish you when dangers approach, to rouse within you every principle of virtuous exertion, and to inspire you with strength to overcome.

Our hearts, Christians, have been deeply pierced with the loss of a most valuable connection, of a venerable pastor, who watched long for our souls, and, with the most unwearied fidelity, pointed out to us the path of happiness. To you, and to the general interests of pure religion, he was attached by many powerful obligations. A native of this city, and descended from a family which, in former times, had given several bright ornaments to the Church of Scotland, he felt the warmest tendencies of nature co-operating with the principles of duty, to call forth all his powers in the sacred service to which he was devoted. And by the blessing of God on his industry, he rose to an eminence in professional merit, which has reflected distinguished honour on the city, on the church, and on the country which produced him.

It was the fortune of Dr Blair to appear at a period when the literature of his country was just beginning to receive polish and

an useful direction ; and when it was emulously cultivated by a bright constellation of young men who were destined to carry it to high perfection. In concert with them he applied himself with diligence and assiduity to all those branches of study which could contribute to form him for the eloquence of the pulpit. This was the department in which he chose to excel ; to which all the force of his genius was directed ; and in which he soon felt that his efforts were to be successful. For from the very commencement of his theological studies, he gave presages of his future attainments ; and, in the societies of his youthful companions, laid the foundations of that splendid reputation which, through a long life of meritorious service, continued to increase ; and which has procured for him as a religious instructor, access to the understandings and the hearts of all the most cultivated inhabitants of the Christian world.

To you, my brethren, who have long enjoyed the inestimable blessing of his immediate instruction, it will not be necessary to describe the qualities of that luminous,
fascina

fascinating eloquence, with which he was accustomed to warm, and ravish, and amend your hearts. You may have heard others who equalled, or even excelled him in some of the requisites of pulpit oratory, in occasional profoundness of thought, in vivid flashes of imagination, or in pathetic addresses to the heart. But there never was a public teacher in whom all these requisites were combined in juster proportions, placed under the direction of a more exquisite sense of propriety, and employed with more uniform success to convey useful and practical instruction. Standing on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, he exhibited the doctrines of Christ in their genuine purity, separated from the dross of superstition, and traced with inimitable elegance, through all their beneficial influence on the consolation, on the order, and on the virtue both of public and private life. Hence his discourses, uniting in the most perfect form the attractions of utility and beauty, gave a new and better tone to the style of instruction from the pulpit; and contributed in a remarkable degree to correct and refine the religious, the moral, and

the literary taste of the times in which he lived.

The universal admiration which attended his ministerial labours, was some recompence to him for the exertions they had cost. But his chief recompence arose from the consciousness of having contributed so eminently to edify the Church of Christ, and from the improving influence which his labours had shed on his own heart. For he was at home and in himself the perfect image of that meekness, simplicity, gentleness, and contentment, which his writings recommend. He was long happy in his domestic relations; and, though doomed at last to feel, through their loss in succession, the heaviest strokes of affliction; yet his mind, fortified by religious habits, and buoyed up by his native tendency to contentment, sustained itself on God, and enabled him to persevere to the end in the active and cheerful discharge of the duties of his station; preparing for the world the blessings of elegant instruction; tendering to the mourner the lessons of divine consolation; guiding the young by his counsels; aiding the meritorious with his influence;

and supporting, by his voice and by his conduct, the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his Country.

With such dispositions and habits it was natural that he should enjoy a distinguished portion of felicity. And perhaps there never was a man who experienced more completely that *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace.* His Country was proud of his merits, and at different times conferred on him, through the hands of the Sovereign, the most honourable and substantial proofs of her approbation: foreign lands learned from him the way of salvation: he saw marks of deference and respect wherever he appeared: and he felt within himself the gratulation of a good conscience, and the hope of immortality. It was peculiarly delightful to see him in the latest period of his life, at the venerable age of eighty-two, looking back on almost threescore years spent in the public service of his God, pleased with the recollections which it gave, possessing a mind still vigorous and clear, the delight of his friends, sensible to the attentions which they paid to him, burning with zeal
for

for the good of the Church, and, with all the ardour of youthful ambition, preparing the materials of a new claim to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. In this active state of preparation, with the lamp of life still clear and bright, he was found by the Great Lord of all when he came to say 'It is enough;' and, after a single night of pain, to call him gently to his rest.

He has gone to give an account of his stewardship.—The Church mourns in him the loss of her brightest ornament.—Let us submit to the stroke with resignation and reverence; and, as the most acceptable proof of respect to his memory, let us learn to practise the lessons which he taught.

—And may the God whom he served in the gospel of his Son, dwell in our hearts to comfort them with the consolations of heaven, and to prepare them for the inheritance of the saints, for Christ's sake. Amen.

SERMON XX.

(Preached at Borthwick, 23d, December 1787, being the first Sunday after the interment of the Right Honourable Robert Dundas of Arniston, Esq. Lord President of the Court of Session.)



PSALM, CXII, 16.

—The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

THE desire of reputation is natural to man. It is part of the social constitution which God has given us; and, when properly directed, has a powerful tendency to promote our moral perfection. By uniting the approbation of our brethren to the testimony of our conscience, it heightens the reward of righteousness, and imparts to virtue an energetic vigour which enables her to despise the allurements of indolence, to resist the temptations of interest and of pleasure, and to guide her votary, through scenes even of danger and death, to great and honourable conduct.

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This principle, which has so extensive power in forming the character of men, is inseparable from their nature. It appears in the mind at a very early period, furnishing to the skilful instructor an important instrument of discipline and education. It seems to collect force as our faculties advance towards maturity. In a generous breast it continues to burn with increasing ardour through the whole of life; and though baser minds, hardened by habitual guilt, may become less sensible to its influence, yet, even in them, it cannot be totally extinguished. In the lowest stage of their degeneracy, they still retain some regard to the judgment of the world. They have still some friends whose opinion they respect, some associates whose contempt they are unwilling to provoke, some estimable qualities, on which they hope to build their fame, and to secure a portion of applause.

But a portion of applause from our immediate neighbours will not satisfy the ambition of our minds. We desire not the esteem of our contemporaries alone. Extending our prospects through a wider
sphere,

sphere, we seek to be approved by the spirits of the just who adorned the ages that are past ; and look forward, with fond expectation, to the reverence that awaits us, after this mortal frame shall have mouldered into dust. As if actuated by a presage of our immortal destination, and of the interest which we shall yet take in future scenes, we often discover greater anxiety to secure the applause of posterity, than of those who are our immediate spectators in the business of life. How often has the patriot, trusting to the judgment of futurity, proceeded with his work of reformation, in opposition to the combined prejudices of his cotemporaries, unable as yet to appreciate the reasons of his conduct ! Even when he falls in the cause of freedom, a martyr to the ignorance or corruption of the times, how often do we see him smiling on death with a generous triumph, looking forward through the infamy which now covers him to the approbation of a more enlightened age, and blessing his enemies for their malevolence, which but consummates the glory of his virtue, and transmits

mits his deathless fame, with a superior lustre, to the latest generations!

But though the desire of reputation be natural to man, and though it operates with peculiar force in the noblest minds; yet it is not to be followed as the guide of our conduct. In itself it is a blind impulse, and produces effects that are either good or bad, according to the direction which it receives. If it leads us to seek the esteem of our brethren by methods which our conscience condemns, to court their applause by flattering their follies or their passions, to cultivate only the accomplishments which coincide with the prepossessions of the times, or to assume the appearance of accomplishments which we do not possess, it deviates from the purpose which it was intended to serve. It is valuable only when it acts in subordination to the principles of virtue, and gives additional force to their impression. Separated from these principles, it becomes a source of corruption and depravity. Instead of animating the soul to generous deeds, it descends to foster the swellings of vain glory, and to
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beget the meanness of ostentation, or the vileness of hypocrisy.

When the love of praise is perverted to such unworthy purposes, it seldom accomplishes its end. For though the artifices of deceit may succeed for a while, and obtain for the undeserving a temporary applause, yet the constitution of things has placed an insuperable bar between the practice of iniquity and a durable reputation. The joy of the hypocrite, saith the scripture, shall last but for a moment. The name of the wicked shall rot, and the remembrance of him perish from the earth. Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. To the virtuous alone belongs the reward of lasting glory; and the Almighty will not suffer a stranger to intermeddle with their joy. For them Providence has prepared the approbation of the age in which they live, and their memorial descends to warm the admiration of succeeding times. Light is sown for the upright; the memory of the just is blessed; and the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.

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This, Christians, is a comfortable doctrine. It tends in some degree to restrain the overflowings of iniquity ; and it supports the courage of good men amid all the difficulties with which they have to struggle. Let me therefore claim your attention, while I proceed to suggest a few observations, for the purpose of confirming this important truth, That the practice of righteousness is the most effectual method to secure the esteem and confidence of the men with whom we live,—and that it will transmit our names with honour to posterity.

When God formed the human mind, he formed it after his own image, impressed with the love of righteousness, and the hatred of iniquity. And though the glory of our nature be now much defaced, yet the remains of this original constitution are still found in it, disposing us to approve and reverence whatever bears the mark of integrity. Amid the ruins of the fall, virtue is still a lovely form, fitted to attract and captivate the heart of man. On every character that bears the impression of her features, she diffuses a resistless charm, which renders it the natural object of our esteem, which gives

us an interest in its fortune, which extorts respect from the wicked themselves, and forces them to acknowledge, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.

This approbation of worthy conduct is the immediate dictate of our nature, and springs up in our hearts without any regard to the advantages that result from it. We applaud justice and generosity, when they appear in distant ages, or in distant nations, though their effects do not extend to us. We respect the magnanimity and public spirit of an enemy, even though they have been employed against our country. They have a value in themselves, independent of the circumstances in which they were exerted, and which every rational mind must perceive and honour.

But virtue appears still more lovely, when viewed in connection with the advantages that spring from it. God has rendered it necessary, in a certain degree at least, to the existence of society; and the voice of interest concurs with the voice of conscience to celebrate its praise. It represents the righteous as blessings to the country where they dwell, as the firmest pillars of the state, and

the only persons that, in the private intercourse of life, deserve the confidence of their brethren. The wicked you may indeed see associating together, for the purposes of riot and dissipation, to spend an idle hour, and to free themselves from the horrors of solitude and reflection. But who is the man to whom they unbosom themselves in the confidence of secrecy; to whom they cling in the hour of difficulty; and by whose counsels they are conducted in every matter of importance? Who is the man to whom, on the bed of death, they commit the helpless orphans whom they leave behind them? In such instances, their conduct proclaims their reverence for virtue, and declares that the righteous man alone is the object of their trust. Though his virtues be a reproof to their own wickedness; yet they cannot withhold from him this honourable testimony of their approbation.

But though righteousness, wherever it is perceived, be the natural and necessary object of respect; yet, in the present scene of confusion, it is too often mingled with circumstances that conceal it from the view of the world. The characters of the best men are here shaded with manifold imperfections.

Even their good qualities are sometimes viewed through the medium of envy or of prejudice. The shaft that flies in the dark may wound their reputation, and the competitions of interest divert our attention from their merit. But these circumstances have, for the most part, but a temporary influence. In consequence of their operation, single and scattered efforts of virtue may be consigned to forgetfulness; but an uniform system of persevering goodness will, in general, overcome every obstacle, and obtain for the righteous, even in their lifetime, the praise that is due to their integrity. The God whom they serve, and in whose hand are the hearts of men, will bring forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon day.

A day at least is coming, which, in the ordinary progress of events, displays the characters of men with sufficient evidence, and bestows on the just their merited applause. When the work of life is finished, an awful tribunal is prepared for the dead in the hearts of those who survive them, appointed by heaven to review their conduct, and to fix the measure of their fame.

Before this tribunal every man must stand to receive his sentence : and Providence has so arranged the course of things, as to secure, in most cases, an equitable decision for the righteous. Death removes the chief causes of uncharitable judgment, and enables us to estimate the value of departed worth, free from the influence of prejudice and passion. The little jealousies which darken the reputation of the living, seldom pursue them beyond the limits of the grave. Envy ceases when their merit has ceased to be an obstacle to our ambition. Their imperfections are buried with their bodies in the tomb, and soon forgotten ; while their better qualities, recalled often to our thoughts, and heightened by the inconveniencies which their departure occasions, live in the remembrance of their neighbours, and receive the tribute of just approbation. We are even willing to repay them by an excess of praise for the injury we did them while alive. Embalmed with the blessings of the good, their memory descends as an inheritance to their posterity ; and their children's children, through many generations, respected on their account, and
animated

animated by the example which they have left, rise up to show the image of their virtues, and to call them blessed.

These, my brethren, are consolations which every good man may carry with him to the bed of death, to support his hopes in the hour of dissolution. However humble his lot may have been, yet he may go down to the grave in peace, trusting that his memory shall not perish in the dust; that the remembrance of his virtues shall live in the circle where his usefulness was known; and that when his Redeemer shall stand on the earth at the latter day, his righteousness shall be published to the assembled world, and crowned with everlasting applause.

But if the righteous man has been called to act in a superior station, if he has been sent by heaven like an angel of mercy, to scatter blessings through a guilty land, to support the glory of a falling constitution, to strengthen the arm of justice, and to diffuse her influence to the remotest corners of an empire, his reward will bear a proportion to the good he has performed. Appearing on a more conspicuous stage, his actions are more exposed to the observation of his

brethren ; the effects of his conduct extend to a greater distance ; and a more numerous multitude is called to witness and approve his virtue. Though envy may sometimes seek to blast his rising glory, and rivals threaten to sap the foundation of his greatness, yet integrity is his sure defence, and the applauding voice of a nation is lifted up to deprecate his fall. Every heart takes an interest in his fortunes. To his declining years, good men look forward as to a public calamity. If he sickens, the skilful of the land attend his couch with filial solicitude ; the anxious voice of inquiry is heard at his door ; and the prayers of the faithful ascend to heaven for his recovery. When he falls, his country mourns. Her sorrowing nobles assemble in crowds to pay the last tender tribute to his memory ; the poor bewail the loss of their protector ; and the widow and the orphan are seen weeping at his grave. But angels have bended from their thrones to receive their kindred spirit, to rejoice with him at the remembrance of the labours he has sustained, and to welcome his arrival in the mansions of the just. His bleeding country,
with

with a generous ardour, labours to perpetuate his worth. The tears of genius fall around his tomb. The faithful page of the historian records his fame, and the sculptured marble transmits to posterity the image of the dead. O! may it rouse them to the imitation of his virtues; and, like the mantle of Elijah, convey to future patriots a portion of his spirit!

Such, Christians, is the care which Providence has taken to perpetuate the remembrance of the righteous. When we commit their bodies to the dust, we may trust that their memory will survive the ruins of this mortal tabernacle, and that their spirits have gone to mingle in the society of the blessed. On their account, therefore, we are not permitted to weep. But when the faithful fail from among men, we may weep for ourselves, and for our children. On the present mournful occasion, we may surely, without a crime, join our voice to the general lamentation of our country, and weep at the remembrance of departed virtue. The distinguished person whose remains we lately consigned to the tomb, was endeared to us by peculiar ties. Living under his immediate protection, we saw more distinctly

the wisdom of his conduct ; and seemed to participate in the honours that were paid him. Descended from a race of patriots, whose services to the country your infant tongues were taught to rehearse, he added new lustre to the ancient reputation of his family. Receiving from nature the principles of a vigorous understanding, which had been carefully improved by a regular and extensive education, he soon attained distinguished eminence in his profession at the bar. At an early period of his life, he was called by his sovereign to take an active share in the direction of public business ; and in the season of danger, when a generous, but misguided multitude, threatened the ruin of our constitution, he contributed, in a very considerable degree, by the vigour and prudence of his conduct, to disconcert the measures of rebellion, and to restore the peace and security of the nation. After rising through the several gradations of law-preferment, and honourably representing his native county in Parliament, he was at last, when in the full vigour of his age, called to fill the most important office in this part of the kingdom, to superintend the functions.

functions of public justice, and to secure to every subject the free enjoyment of his rights. To this office he brought an assemblage of great qualities that are rarely united in the same person. With that minute knowledge of business which practice alone can bestow, he possessed an acuteness of judgment, which perceived at a glance the point on which any question rested ; an extent of memory from which no essential circumstance could escape ; and a patience of investigation that would have given distinction to men whose abilities were far inferior to his. To these intellectual talents, he added the still more valuable qualities of the heart, a warm and steady love of justice, with that incorruptible integrity, which nothing could seduce from the path of duty. Even his external appearance wore the aspect of command, and inspired an awful respect befitting the dignity of a supreme Court.

With these accomplishments he took his station at the head of the bench of justice ; and soon rose, in the general opinion of his country, to be the first character in the list of Presidents. During the long period of his administration, justice flowed through

the land in a clear untroubled stream, free from those obstructions that have been so often permitted to retard its course, and which are sometimes more ruinous to the contending parties than an iniquitous decision. Assiduous himself and ardent in the duties of his profession, he inspired into the breasts of his colleagues a portion of the same spirit, and introduced into law-proceedings a vigour and dispatch hitherto unknown. Notwithstanding the great increase of business which the increased prosperity of the nation must have necessarily occasioned, he left at his death a smaller number of undecided causes than any of his predecessors*.

These were the circumstances that attracted the applause of his contemporaries, and which have rendered his death an irreparable calamity to the nation. But by us, my brethren, he was known for other virtues. The public have lost a faithful
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* At his admission to the office, he found business that had been ready for receiving the judgment of the Court for more than two years. At his death no cause remained undecided that had been ready for decision a few weeks before.

and able magistrate ; but we have lost a father and a friend. We saw him in the more private walks of life, and experienced the warmth of his attachment, or the blessings of his protection. The same ardour of mind that marked his public character, descended with him to his retirement, to enliven his devotion, and to prompt his benevolence. Attached to the ordinances of religion, and active in his duty as a member of the church, he was studious to give you, in this holy place, an example of that public reverence which is due from all to the Father of their spirits. Hospitable in his disposition, attentive in his manner, lively in his conversation, and steady in his friendships, he was peculiarly formed to secure the esteem of his acquaintance, and to promote the intercourse of social life. The poor who mourn for his loss, and his domestics who have grown old in his service, testify the general humanity of his mind. But the warmth of his paternal affections was known to his family alone, and to those who have seen him mingling with them in the tenderness of domestic endearment, who have marked his eye
swim-

swimming with a parent's fondness, while he surveyed the numerous progeny sent by heaven to bless the evening of his day, and to transmit the memory and the image of his virtues to their succeeding race. These were affections which he laboured to conceal. But they were marked by those who studied his conduct : they are recorded in the register of heaven, and will meet their reward.

Such were the qualities that adorned the illustrious Judge whose death we now deplore. If he had his failings, (and the lot of humanity, alas ! was also his), they were the failings of a great mind, and sprang from the same impetuosity of temper which was the source of his noblest virtues. But they are now gone to the drear abode of forgetfulness ; while his better qualities live in the hearts of the good, and will descend in the records of fame to rouse the emulation of distant ages. He has gone himself to his destined habitation, to appear before the Great Judge of all, and to receive according to his deeds. Let us, my brethren, prepare to follow him. For though we be still permitted to prolong the term of our probation

probation, and to enjoy the society of our friends on earth, yet we also must soon enter the narrow house, and mingle our bones with the ashes of our fathers. God alone knows the hour that is appointed to lay us with the dead. To some he grants a term of many years, and enables them to rejoice in them all ; while others scarcely open their eyes to the light of heaven, when he commands them to withdraw again into darkness and disappear. Of those who joined us in paying funeral honours to the deceased, one illustrious shade has gone already to visit him in the land of souls*.

Our lot will follow in its turn. The present day alone is ours. Even before it has reached its close, the angel of death may have raised his hand to heaven, and sworn by Him that liveth for ever, that time, with regard to us, shall be no more. If at this solemn moment, he were to descend in the terrors of his wrath, and standing visibly before us, to summon us away to the assembly of our fathers, what would be the feelings of our hearts ! and that awful moment is

* John Earl of Hyndford, who died suddenly on the third day after the interment of his friend the Lord President.

is fast approaching to us all. Let us prepare to meet it with the composure and the confidence of Christians. Let us live the life of the righteous, and our last end shall be like his. Then, when we fall, we shall fall lamented by the good ; and while our bodies sleep in the silence of the tomb, our names shall be in everlasting remembrance, and our spirits shall rise to the habitations of the just. Amen.

SERMON XXI.

2. TIM. 1, 10.

—Who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

IN the whole circle of human investigation, we find no subject more interesting to man than the question which respects his existence in a future world. The slightest survey of his present condition exhibits many melancholy proofs of its imperfection. We see him possessing capacities of happiness to which this earth affords no suitable gratification ; and exerting powers both of knowledge and of action in a scene which is too limited for their range, and far too transient for their full improvement. In these circumstances it is natural for him to
ask,

whether the present stage be the only one upon which he is destined to appear? Whether he shall ever be placed in a situation more favourable to the exercise and cultivation of his faculties, or whether all those ennobling sentiments of happiness and perfection, which at times fill and elevate his soul, must sink with his body, and perish in the grave?

To these questions the Christian revelation enables us to give satisfying answers, and to pronounce decisively that man will survive the dissolution of his mortal body. The text, in particular, intimates that our Saviour *Jesus Christ hath rendered death of no effect, and that he hath cast light on life and incorruption through the gospel.* Our translators indeed render the words more strongly, and convey to us the meaning, that before Christ, life and immortality were altogether unknown, and that they were then *brought to light.* But for this meaning the original language of the Apostle affords no authority. He asserts only, according to the literal interpretation of his words, that our Saviour enlightened these subjects, and thus he leaves the knowledge of the heathens and
Jews

Jews concerning them in possession of its natural value. That knowledge, it is true, was very imperfect ; but it had its use even then. It may be useful still in various respects ; and in a question of so much practical importance as that of the life to come, it is neither wise nor grateful to cast away with contempt any gleams of light which the wisdom of our Father has imparted to us. I propose, therefore

I. To state, and estimate the degree of light which men possessed, respecting a future existence before the appearance of Christ. And,

II. To point out the important additions which have been made to this light through his gospel.

1. On the first of these subjects it cannot fail to strike us as a remarkable fact, that an opinion in favour of immortality has universally prevailed. This opinion is to be found not only amid the improvements of philosophy, and the refinements of polished life : it pervades every rank of society, and seems to accompany the human race through

all the conditions of their being. Follow man even to his rudest state—to the forest or the cave. You may find him without any civil polity, uninstructed in sciences and arts, unacquainted with the conveniencies of life, attentive only to the cravings of his sensitive nature, and wandering about in quest of subsistence, raised but a single step above the animals which minister to his wants. Yet even this man, unenlightened as he is, looks forward to better days, and is encouraged to support the ills of life by hopes similar to those which animate the breast of a Christian.

The circumstances, indeed, with which the different races of men have associated their notion of the world to come, appear with great diversity—a diversity which arises unavoidably from the manner in which their conceptions of it are formed. Their ideas of that untried state must, from the very nature of things, be derived from the enjoyments of their present condition, and must, consequently, be modified by the nature of the happiness which they have experienced on earth. But their differences respecting the description of the future world

world affect neither the reality nor the strength of their belief in its existence. The general idea of an *hereafter* is the same in them all, and prevails universally.

From whence can this universal agreement of opinion have proceeded? From some cause, certainly, which is common to all mankind, and which is uniform and universal in its operation. It must either be a natural result from the ordinary principles of their frame; or the effect of an original revelation meeting within them principles congenial to itself, and which, therefore, amid the loss of so many other traditions, has continued to accompany them through all their dispersions. For the united consent of mankind, on any subject in which they have an immediate interest, is the voice of their nature—a voice which proceeds from the wise Author of their frame, intimating to his children the happiness which they are formed to relish, and the perfection which they are destined to attain.

The general and continued prevalence of this opinion, therefore, even supposing it to have originated in tradition, must be traced ultimately to the natural sentiments of the

human heart. Man, in the exercise of his natural powers, feels that he is born for immortality. He carries with him, wherever he turns, a strong desire to survive the present life, and an involuntary presage of a future existence. His mind seems conscious to herself that this mortal state is a depression below her native dignity. His affections dwell often with friends who have left it—he experiences an incompleteness in all its enjoyments—he feels wants which it cannot satisfy—and, under the impulse of a spring that operates for ever in his soul, he bends his eye towards another region where he shall meet again the friends of his heart; where the inconveniencies of his present condition shall be removed; where his powers shall no more suffer fatigue; and where objects more worthy of his pursuit shall be placed before him.

In the confused notions then which take their rise from this mixture of feelings, we may find the elements of that hope which, in every age, has led men to anticipate the enjoyments of a future world. And the expectation which this natural impulse produces

duces is not inconsistent with the most enlightened suggestions of reason. Various considerations may be mentioned which tend to give it a rational support. With this view let me observe

2. When we turn our eye to the human frame, we discover irresistible proofs that it consists of two substances, a body and a soul—substances which have separate functions and qualities, and which are, in some respects, totally independent of each other. The body is a compound of material particles, and is therefore naturally liable to decomposition. It is known to be in perpetual flux, and, in the course of a short life changes repeatedly every particle of its substance. The soul on the contrary could not perform its functions of thinking, comparing, and reasoning unless it were a simple substance; and if it be a simple substance it cannot perish by dissolution, nor by any mode of destruction of which nature has given us an example. We know, at least, that the mere shifting of its bodily covering does not affect it; for we have the most satisfactory evidence, even the evidence of consciousness, that it continues permanent through

through the successive changes that befall the body in the course of this life, and that in fact it survives repeatedly the complete waste of our material frame? Why then should we suppose that the sudden bodily change which we call death exerts over it a power, of which no former bodily change indicated any trace? The soul, simple as it is, may no doubt be annihilated by an act of the divine will; but of such acts of annihilation we have no experience; we have no reason to believe that they were ever exerted; and therefore we can have no title to conclude that they will accompany the stroke of death.

Nay, when we contemplate the course of things attentively, we may find from analogy, some ground to conclude that the great change of death, so far from being the destruction of the soul, is a necessary step in its progress to a more perfect existence. The death of organized beings seems to be the general principle of their renovation. All nature dies to live again. And every living thing advances, from one stage of perfection to a higher, by changes not unlike the death of man. The desolations of winter

ter prepare in secret the renovescence of spring, and the glories of harvest. The plant does not send forth its leaves till the seed has suffered corruption in the ground ; the butterfly does not unfold its wing to the sun until the worm from which it springs has experienced a change similar to the pang of dissolution ; nor does the eagle mount to the skies till he has left in ruins the shell which covered and confined him. Even man himself confirms this analogy, and exhibits in the history of his past condition, some striking examples of the same general law. The hour of his birth, in particular, produced on his means of subsistence and life a change no less total than that which will be produced by the hour of his death. Yet that change, instead of extinguishing the feeble spirit within him, served only to emancipate its powers, to encrease their number, and to place them in circumstances more favourable for their improvement.

It is obvious then from philosophical principles that the change which happens to us at death, however formidable to the imagination and to the feelings that depend

on it, will most probably affect the body only, and that it gives us no reasonable ground to doubt the future subsistence of the soul. The soul seems to be a being of a totally different class. It is, as far we can judge, naturally incapable of dissolution. And when we still farther consider

3. The powers with which it is endowed, their excellence, and their seeming adaptation to a higher state of being, the presumption still increases that it is destined to survive the stroke of death, and to complete its improvement in another scene.

Of all the creatures on this earth man is evidently the most perfect. In bodily strength and agility, he is indeed inferior to many of the animal tribes; but the powers of his mind raise him to a lofty pre-eminence, and enable him to exercise uncontrolled dominion over all the inhabitants of this globe. These powers in their number, in their excellence, in the celerity and precision of their exertions, and, above all, in their beautiful adjustment to each other, exhibit the most admirable specimen of contrivance and skill. But many of them seem destined for a state of being different
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from that in which we are now placed; and they obviously require for their full evolution a much longer duration than the limits of the present life assign to them.

When we confine our view to the mere instincts and powers of our sensitive nature, we find them terminating in the body. They seem to be given solely for the purpose of securing its preservation and comfort: and during its appointed time, they answer completely the end for which they were destined. They minister to bodily health and enjoyment: they advertise us of whatever might be hurtful to our frame; they suggest the means of removing it, and enable the most uncultivated of our race to accomplish in perfection all the ends of his animal existence. This system of powers therefore, having their end in this life, are attached to the mortal body: they grow with its growth, strengthen with its maturity, participate in its decline, and sink with it into the grave.

There are other capacities in our nature which seem to be of an intermediate class between those which link us to matter, and those which are purely spiritual. They
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aid and direct the sensitive faculties in fulfilling their destination ; and at the same time they furnish materials for the exercise and cultivation of our nobler powers. From them, however, on account of this double use, no clear inference can be drawn concerning the subject before us. They are subservient to the body and its functions, and therefore it may be contended that in ministering to it, they complete the purpose for which they were given.

But we have a system of powers of far nobler description, which have little connection with the body, and which, in their cultivation, seem rather to impede and injure its functions than to improve them. They engage us in speculations which are foreign to its concerns ; they render us inattentive to its calls ; they are, in many instances, little affected by its infirmities ; and they often advance towards their perfection in the midst of its diseases and decline. Busied for ever about an invisible order of things, they delight, in rising above this changing world, to trace the permanent laws which regulate the movements of the universe, to detect those eternal and universal relations

relations which conceal themselves from the eye of sense, and to dwell on the contemplation of beings that are spiritual and everlasting. Through such exercises they gradually exalt our nature ; introduce us in thought to worlds far brighter than we now behold ; and excite within us feelings, and affections, and hopes, corresponding to the glorious scenes which they disclose. To this class of powers belong that consciousness of inherent dignity which lifts the virtuous soul above sensual enjoyments, those intellectual capacities which seem fitted for endless progress in improvement ; those devout affections which find not here their proper object ; and all those enlivening hopes which prompt us irresistibly to look forward, and to take an interest in the condition and employment of future times.

Now concerning this system of powers what conclusion does sound reason suggest? Shall we suppose that they were given merely for the purposes of a state, to which they are scarcely in any degree subservient, which is altogether unworthy of them, and which closes while they are only tending to the maturity of their strength? Must we
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not rather adopt the principle of judgment which, in similar cases has often guided the naturalist to a just view of the works of God? He finds in the waters and on the earth living beings with a system of organs suited to the element which they now occupy, and at the same time inclosing under it another system of organs which is of no use to them at present, but which seems fitted to qualify them for taking their station in a different element. In these circumstances, which frequently occur to him, what judgment does he think himself entitled to form? That these inhabitants of the waters and of the earth are only in the first stage of their existence, in a state of preparation for a higher; that their interior system of organs, protected by the integuments which invest it, is gradually acquiring the vigor requisite for its full display; and that the time is not far distant when they shall burst their coarser covering, and become the free tenants of the air and of the sky.—This conclusion universal experience confirms. And why should we not apply it to explain a similar appearance in the state of man? His present condition
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bears a very close resemblance to the case now mentioned, and seems indeed to be only a particular instance of the same general law. On this principle therefore we are bound to conclude that those powers of his nature, which find not their full expansion here, are the germs of a nobler being which death shall disclose, and which, in its proper element, shall shine hereafter in complete maturity and perfection.

These considerations encourage us to look beyond the grave, and to regard death merely as a link in the chain of means appointed to carry forward the soul to its destined perfection. But they furnish ground for no farther conclusion on the subject. They leave us in perfect darkness concerning the enjoyments of the future state, and their dependence on the nature of our present conduct. On these points, however, as well as on the general doctrine of an hereafter, we receive some light from reviewing

4. The present course of human things, and its frequent inconsistency with the best notions we can form of the character of God, and of his government.

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The natural feelings of the heart give sufficient evidence that there is a difference in actions and characters with respect to their moral qualities ; that righteousness is imposed upon us as a law by the principles of our frame ; that obedience to this law merits reward ; and that the transgression of it shall be followed by punishment. Reason demonstrates that God, the great source of moral perfection, must love his own image, and honour those who honour him : and conscience proclaims, with a voice that reaches throughout the earth that, a throne is set for judgment, and that it must be well with the righteous and ill with the wicked.

These feelings are themselves a commencement of moral retribution within us, and they lead us irresistibly to expect that the course of things without us will be arranged conformably to them. But when we turn our eyes abroad, and seek to find in the events of life a scene corresponding to the anticipations we had formed, we are greatly disappointed. We see indeed sufficient indications that the Almighty Governor is not totally indifferent to the conduct of his sub-

jects ; that the general tendency of his administration is favourable to righteousness ; and that his arrangements for its support are advancing by a gradual progress towards the full attainment of their end. It is obvious, however, that this progress is not completed during the term of our present probation, and that in many particular instances it is altogether counteracted. We see external advantages often parcelled out with an indiscriminating hand, and *time and chance happening unto all*. We see often that *there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked ; that as is the good so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath*. Nay, we sometimes see virtue borne down, and rendered a direct source of persecution and of temporal misfortune to those who adhere to it.

In these circumstances the pious man has often felt himself perplexed by the apparent injustice of the scene before him. On witnessing the triumphs of successful wickedness, in contrast with the sore depression of modest merit, he has ventured at times to accuse the partial blindness of providence. He has even felt the spirit of indignation
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rise within him at the sight of great, but defeated, virtue, and shed tears of anguish on the sacred ashes of a Baptist, and of other holy martyrs, who have died for God and for their country. And did the stroke of death put a final period to the existence of these exalted spirits, were no reward reserved for them hereafter—thy tears, O man, would deserve to flow. Virtue, as to them would be worse than “an empty name:” it would be a direct cause of punishment without any possibility of recompense. The world in which thou art would be the dark abode of misrule; and the moral principles of thy frame an inexplicable mystery.

But such things cannot be. They contradict our best established notions respecting the divine character and perfections. The appearances that seem to indicate them are evidently the beginnings only of an unfinished plan for cultivating the human faculties. They belong to a state where virtue is but forming, and forming through the only means adapted to its nature, exercise and temptation. That state soon passes away; and there must be another, where

where virtue shall appear in its maturity, accompanied by its natural effects ; where rewards and punishments shall be impartially administered, and where the ways of providence respecting it shall be completely vindicated.

Such, Christians, is a very brief statement of the evidence furnished by the light of nature concerning the future subsistence of our souls. That evidence is in many respects imperfect. There is none of its parts to which plausible objections have not been made ; and, even though these objections were capable of being completely removed, it rests, as you have seen, on complicated trains of reasoning, which exceed the reach of common minds, and which could never, therefore, be successfully applied to the direction of ordinary life. Still, however, it is of great value. Though it cannot perhaps give much confidence to hope ; yet it may serve at least to prepare the pious mind for the brighter discoveries of revelation ; to repress the presumption of the Infidel ; and to check vice by shewing the sinner that the fears which conscience inspires may probably come to be awfully realized.

The information, given to the Jews on this subject, did not add much to the evidence furnished by the light of nature. This people, indeed, were better instructed than the heathen, respecting the character of God, and the obligations of duty, and therefore better qualified to estimate the force of arguments, drawn from this source, respecting the future condition of the soul. They had even some new principles of judging concerning it, laid before them in the gracious terms of the covenants made with Abraham and his posterity. And the books of their prophets contain expressions which encourage the hope of a future resurrection. But these expressions are of ambiguous import: they may be, and often have been, interpreted as sublime, figurative predictions of the revival of temporal prosperity to their country: and the terms of the covenants, made with the patriarchs, furnish only the materials of an argument, which was never fully understood till explained by Christ, and which it was difficult to state in a form to which perplexing objections might not be offered. Accordingly, we find in fact that the same doubts which impeded the effect of this doctrine

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in other countries were felt by the religious men of Judea, and that, in this favoured land, there was a numerous sect who *said that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit.*

The result then of this whole enquiry is, that, before the appearance of Christ, men had some knowledge of a future world; but that their prospect into it was far from being clear. Clouds and shadows veiled it from their view. At every step, difficulties rose to perplex them, and nature looked earnestly for some brighter light to dissipate the gloom. That brighter light has shone upon the earth. The messenger of God has descended, and, by the sure word of revelation, has proclaimed that the soul does not go down with the body into the grave; but that, *when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

To examine the extent of the addition thus made to the light of nature—is the second branch of our proposed enquiry, which will form the subject of another discourse.

SERMON XXII.

The same Subject continued.



2. TIM. I, 10.

—Who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

WE have already seen that the light of nature furnishes some information respecting a future state. The feelings of the heart lead us to anticipate a more perfect world than that in which we are now placed; the deductions of reason give ground to hope that this anticipation will not be disappointed; and the principles of our moral constitution suggest a confused persuasion that, in the land beyond the grave, the triumphs of wickedness shall cease, and the salvation of the just be established. On all these points, however, the light of reason leaves much darkness and uncertainty.

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The hopes of nature are counteracted and almost extinguished by its fears : and the rational arguments in favour of a future existence, while they seem scarcely reconcilable with the evidence of the senses, are in themselves difficult of comprehension, and at the best afford no information respecting either the employments or the duration of the life to which they point. Hence, we find the wisest men in the heathen world uttering deep complaints concerning their ignorance on this subject, and going down to the grave in sad uncertainty whether any part of them was destined to escape its ravages. *I am about to leave this world,* said the best moralist of antiquity, in the immediate prospect of his departure, *I am about to leave this world, and ye are to continue in it ; which of us have the better part allotted to us God only knows, no man on this earth can certainly tell.*

The hopes of a departing Jew, who had lived conformably to the prescriptions of his law, were somewhat better supported. He had more distinct information given to him concerning an invisible world, and he might have inferred from the promises

made to the Fathers, and from the declarations of the prophets, that man shall be ransomed from the grave, and restored to everlasting life. Yet in fact these inferences seem to have been but imperfectly drawn; for, of the two sects into which the Jews were divided, one denied altogether the doctrine of a future state, and the other seems to have had a very erroneous conception of it. The Sadducees said that there is no resurrection, and most of the Pharisees, according to the account of their great historian, believed that the resurrection extends only to those who are free from notorious wickedness, and that it will consist merely in a transmigration of the soul into a new body.

It was reserved for the Christian revelation to dispel the darkness which covered the grave, and to open before us a clear and certain prospect into the world beyond it. Our Saviour Jesus Christ, as we learn from the text, hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel. In estimating the light which Christ has shed on this doctrine, we may consider

I. The

I. The truths which he has revealed concerning the future world ; and

II. The evidence by which he has accompanied them.

The truths which christianity reveals concerning the future world are various and important. It confirms

1. The hope of nature that the souls of men shall not perish at death, but continue to exist and act in a manner suited to their capacity. It informs us that when the body shall go down to the dust, the spirit will return to God who gave it. It hath even given us examples of the fact, and called on us, as it were, to witness the condition of the departed. In the Gospel History, we see Moses and Elias descending from the abode of glorified spirits on high, and conversing with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration. We see Lazarus, when he died, carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, and the rich man, who was buried, lifting up his eyes in the torments of Hell. We hear our Redeemer comforting the penitent malefactor, who suffered with him on the Cross by the gracious assurance, *This day shalt*

thou be with me in paradise. And, with St John in the visions of heaven, we behold, under the altar, the souls of them that were slain for the testimony which they held, crying unto God for vengeance, and exhorted to rest for a little season until their fellow servants also, and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

But the life of the soul alone is not sufficient to satisfy the longings of the human heart. Though we see the body after death mingling with the dust, and nature unable to give us any hope concerning it; yet we cannot help regarding it as an essential part of ourselves, and are unwilling to resign it to everlasting destruction. We feel that, without it, the man would be incomplete, and incapable of executing the functions which we assign to him. With delight therefore we learn from the gospel,

2. That the body also shall in due time be redeemed from the dust of death, and reunited to its former spirit.

How long the dominion of the grave shall prevail has not been revealed to us: but we have the most satisfactory information that
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it shall not last for ever. Even amid the shadows of the Jewish dispensation, Daniel foresaw that *many of them who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake*. Christ, with far more clearness, lays before us an explicit account of this great restoration, and of the power by which it shall be effected. *As the Father, saith he, raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour is coming, in which the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live. I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* And the apostles, with a minuteness, like that of actual vision, describe the circumstances by which this event shall be accompanied. *The Lord himself, say they, shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. The dominion of darkness shall be moved at his approach, the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then they which are alive at his coming shall be changed, and they shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and they shall be ever with the Lord.*

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On this subject vain questions have often been stated, and answers as vain have sometimes been given to them. Perhaps you may desire to know the mode by which the resurrection shall be effected, and with what body the dead shall come. Alas! vain, short-sighted man, wilt thou never learn to recognize the limits of thine own understanding, to know that thou hast no concern with the manner in which the divine operations are performed, and to feel that the extent of thy power is as nothing in comparison with the power of the Omnipotent? *canst thou weigh me the weight of the fire, or measure me the blast of the wind, or call me again the day that is past?* Canst thou even tell me how the particles of thy present body were compacted together? or what, amid the daily wastings of thy material frame, constitutes thee the same person now which thou wert in former years? These are thine own things, and such as have grown up with thee, and if thou canst not explain them, how shouldst thou expect to be able to comprehend the way of the Highest, and to understand the things that are above the height of the heavens? Is it not enough for
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thee, who hast never been able to fathom any one work of the Almighty—is it not enough for thee, as in other cases, to know the facts with which this operation shall be accompanied, that the power of God hath no bound? that he hath told thee that at the last day thy body shall come forth from the grave as much the same with the body that was deposited in it, as the grain in harvest is the same with the seed from which it sprung? that henceforward thy body shall be like the glorious body of Christ, spiritual, incorruptible, and immortal? that the Saviour hath given thee in his own resurrection, an example of what shall happen to all mankind? and that his servant John beheld in prophetic vision the dead, small and great, standing before the throne of God, the sea having given up the dead that were in it, and death and hell having delivered up the dead that were in them, that every one of them might be judged according to his works? These are plain declarations. They relate to events which are as intelligible in themselves as any of the things which thou seest around thee, and which are awfully interesting in their consequences.

ces. For we learn still farther from the gospel,

3. That the resurrection shall not be a mere transient display of divine power, but an introduction to an immutable state of retribution in which the righteous and the wicked shall receive for ever the due recompence of their conduct. They that have done good *shall come forth unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. They shall be separated one from another in the judgment, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats, and they shall go away, the wicked into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

This information is of invaluable importance, both in itself, and on account of the light which it reflects on the design of our present condition. We are here, my brethren, for the purposes, not of enjoyment chiefly, but of discipline. We have commenced the career of an endless existence, and, by the wise ordination of our Father, it depends on the short term of this mortal life, whether that existence shall be happy or miserable for ever. For we are assured that *God hath appointed a day in which he*
will!

will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ; and that in this day of the revelation of his righteous judgment. he shall render to every man according to his deeds ; to them who by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness ; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil.

What shall be the precise nature and ingredients of our future recompense we cannot as yet fully comprehend. The state of the world to come shall differ so essentially from what we have been accustomed to behold on earth, that the words which here serve the purposes of communication cannot be made to convey any just representation of it. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared* either for those who obey, or for those who disobey him. The most desirable objects on earth, collected together, and embellished with every charm that fancy can bestow, could give only a faint shadow of the glory that shall

shall then be revealed. While the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power; the saints, cloathed in pure incorruptible bodies which can never more decay, shall accompany their Judge to the immediate vision of God, where *they shall be satisfied with his likeness, and become as the angels that stand before his throne. They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more.* Freed from pain and sorrow and temptation; soothed with every delight that can captivate the understanding and the heart; and advancing in endless progress towards the summit of virtuous perfection, their bliss shall henceforth be complete. And they shall have no cause to fear for its termination; for they shall die no more, but reign with the Lamb for ever and ever, enlightened by the glory of God, protected by his power, and refreshed with the pure river of the water of life that flows from his throne.

Such are the discoveries which the Gospel has made to us respecting the future condition of our being. As far as our faculties will admit them, and considered

sidered merely as facts, they are clear, definite and satisfactory. The bare statement of them is sufficient to convince us that, in point of brightness and consistency, they far transcend the most enlightened anticipations of ancient wisdom. Let us next

II. Examine the evidence on which we are called to receive these discoveries, and enquire whether the light which Christ has shed on life and immortality be as superior in this respect to the light of nature, as in the kind of knowledge which it has conveyed.

Here it may be proper to premise that all the sources from which arguments could ever be drawn on this subject remain to the Christian in their full force. He feels the hopes of nature as intensely as any other man, and sees as clearly the indications in their favour which are furnished by analogy, and by a careful consideration of the works and ways of God. Nay, in all these respects, he enjoys an unspeakable advantage through the juster views which have been given to him concerning

the divine perfections and government. Though the gospel had been entirely silent about the world to come, a virtuous christian, in the due use of the other lights which it communicates, would have been able to look forward with increased confidence towards the recompence of reward. Accordingly we find in fact that even the natural arguments in support of a future existence are now freed from many difficulties which formerly perplexed them, and that they can be proposed with an energy and conviction of which the most enlightened heathen had no idea.

It deserves also to be remarked that the very clearness and consistency of the accounts which Christ has given of the future state secure for them a ready admission into the mind, just as the compactness of a philosophic theory, and a clear exposition of the facts to which it relates, recommend it to general acceptance. These accounts bear on their face indisputable indications of his superior knowledge; they convey distinct information on a point where the understanding had hitherto laboured under the most anxious uncertainty :

ty : and in their harmony with each other, and with the best sentiments of the heart, they possess an essential character of truth which was wanting to all former conjectures, and which, wherever it appears, has powerful influence on the determinations of our judgment.

But besides confirming in these ways, and improving the original proofs of immortality, the gospel has brought to its support a direct train of new and independent evidence to which nature was a total stranger. It has given us an unexceptionable witness from heaven, the Prince of the invisible world himself, who spake what he saw, whose testimony is explicit, and whose discoveries have removed the chief difficulties by which this doctrine was formerly opposed.

I have already mentioned the substance of what has been attested by the Son of God concerning the future prospects of the human race ; and what has been stated leaves no doubt that the doctrine of life and immortality forms a leading portion of the faith which he delivered to the saints ; and that, consequently, the truth of this doctrine is sup-

ported by all the evidence which establishes the divinity of his mission. Prophecy and vision and miracle, therefore, now unite their influence with the sentiments of nature to support the hope of mortals, and to assure them that they shall outlive the desolations of the grave.

Nay, for the complete justification of our faith on this head, the Christian revelation has done more than announce the fact, and prove the commission of its attester. It hath removed all darkness from this part of the divine administration, by explaining distinctly the history of death, the manner of its introduction among men, and the means by which its power shall be finally subverted.

Death, we now know, had no place in the original constitution of the universe, and therefore it is not surprising that nature should have been puzzled by the desolation which he wrought. He was not made by God who created the generations of the world without any *poison of destruction in them; but ungodly men with their works and words called him unto them.* He sprung from transgression, and can exist only through the
existence

existence of his parent. *By one man's sin be entered into the world, and passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* Whenever therefore sin shall be destroyed, death its effect must cease. Now the great end of the Christian dispensation is to destroy that work of the devil, sin; and to restore men to their original condition of innocence and purity. For this end Jesus, the Son of the most high, appeared on earth to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He bore the penalty, that was due to us, and by the merits of his obedience and death made satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and perfected for ever them that are sanctified. *There is now, therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit ;* for as, through the offence of one, sin reigned unto death; even so, through the obedience of one, grace now reigneth through righteousness unto eternal life.

Christ then, it appears, has now a right to rescue his subjects from the dominion of the grave. And if he has a right to do so, what can prevent it from being carried into effect? Is it possible to believe that he will

be unwilling to exert a privilege which he shed his blood to obtain? or can we suppose that his power is unequal to the task? Behold, O Christian, thy Redemer is the Lord of heaven and earth. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* And can it be more difficult for him, or does it seem even to thyself more impracticable, to collect and restore the particles of thy scattered dust, than it was to form and animate them at first? He has innumerable means of accomplishing his purpose, of which thou hast no knowledge, and he has already given thee many proofs of his power over the tyrant of the grave. Did he not by the voice of his prophets call back from his grasp the bodies of different men whose spirits had departed? Did he not, while he sojourned on earth, restore to Jairus his daughter; to the widow of Nain her beloved son; to the sisters of Lazarus the brother whom they had buried? Did not, in the hour of his crucifixion, the graves open, and many bodies of saints which slept arise, and go into the holy city, and appear to many? And did he not himself, after finishing

transgression and sin, burst asunder the bands of death, and come forth triumphant from the grave, as the forerunner of his people, in token that the powers of hell are vanquished, that *he is Lord of the dead and of the living, and that them who sleep in Jesus God will bring with him?* Cease then, ye followers of that which is good, cease to doubt the promise of the world to come. *Your Redeemer liveth, and because He lives, ye shall live also.—He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you.—Ye shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order; Christ the first fruits, and afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming.*

In the gospel, therefore, we have not only the direct evidence of testimony, supporting the doctrine of a future life; we see also the obstacles to that life removed; the power by which it shall be conferred unveiled; and a reason given why, under the just government of the Almighty, this hope of the righteous cannot fail to be accomplished. *The sting of death was sin, and Christ, by abolishing sin, hath destroyed him that had the power of death, and delivered*

them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject unto bondage.

How inestimable then are the benefits we derive from the gospel of Christ, even though it had communicated to us no other light, but that which we have now been contemplating! By unbarring the gate of futurity, it has resolved some of the most anxious questions which the human understanding had ever proposed: and the solution which it gives is satisfactory in itself, consoling to the virtuous heart, and powerful to support the cause of righteousness among men. What an interest does it impart even to the events of this transitory life, when it represents them as the blossoms of everlasting glory, as the means which our Father has appointed to exercise and prepare us for never-ending happiness in heaven? With what bright gleams of comfort does it enlighten the cloud of affliction, and the couch of the dying? *Sorrow not as those who have no hope; for to die is gain, and our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory.* How animating is the call which it gives to virtuous

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exertion? What resistless energy does it impart to us in our conflicts with the powers of sin? What holy aspirations rise within us, when in the hour of temptation, or on the verge of eternity, we hear through the darkness the angel's voice proclaiming from on high, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them?*

Let us therefore, Christians, listen with affection to him who speaketh to us from heaven; and let us act henceforth as the heirs of an immortal inheritance. Though we had no better evidence concerning it than the light of nature furnishes, true wisdom would lead us to have respect to it in forming our scheme of conduct. To live virtuously with a view to it can do us no harm, though it should turn out to be only a delusion of the fancy: but if it be a reality, how inexpressible must be the folly of neglecting it! for who can lie down in devouring fire, or dwell with everlasting burnings? Even on the slight presumptions therefore which nature gives, it would be our interest to act as children of the world

to come. But how unspeakably is that interest magnified by the discoveries of the gospel! *The light of the moon is now become as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun sevenfold.* We know with more certainty that we shall live hereafter, and that each of us shall receive according to his deeds, than we know what shall be the issue of any worldly project in which we can engage. The issue of such projects may be disappointed by innumerable accidents; but the word of the Lord abideth for ever, and his promise cannot fail. Let us therefore keep ever in our view the great end of our existence. *Being risen with Christ, let us set our affections, not on the things of the earth, but on the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Let us lay aside every weight, and the sins which so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.* If we advance unwearied in the path of obedience, our feet shall soon reach the borders of Immanuel's land: we shall be admitted through the gate into the everlasting city of our God: and *when Christ who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him in glory.*
Amen. SER-

SERMON XXIII.

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RÉVELATION, XIV, 13.

—*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth ; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them.*

AMONG the many considerations by which the gospel supports our hearts under the evils of life, there is none more interesting and consolatory to good men, than the prospect which it opens of the world beyond the grave. Unveiling to a certain degree the plan of providence, respecting the future condition of man, this prospect throws a new light on all the events which we witness upon earth. It shews them not by themselves and unconnected ; but as parts of a great system, and as related to an endless train of consequences on our future perfection and happiness. Viewed
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in this light the most formidable evils to this life assume a friendly aspect. Even death loses his terrors ; and appears as the messenger of God sent to release his servants from the toils of their mortal condition, and to introduce them to the unspeakable and never ending joys of their Lord.

While we continue in this dark estate, our conceptions of the future glories of the just must indeed be faint and inadequate. The changes which death makes in our condition are so numerous and great, that we cannot reason with any certainty from what we experience at present to what shall be the precise nature of our state hereafter. Disencumbered of the body and its organs, and placed in a new relation to external things, our modes of perceiving, of feeling, and of acting must undergo an essential alteration, and we do not yet know what the full effect of that alteration will be. Even the gospel speaks of it as a glory that yet remains to be revealed. Our present faculties are not fitted to comprehend its extent : our present languages cannot express the ingredients which compose

pose it : and though we were capable of seeing it in all its brightness, the unveiled manifestation of it would not be for creatures like us an object of rational desire. It would raise us too far above the sphere in which we are called to act ; disqualify us for the duties and enjoyments of our station ; destroy that balance between good and evil which constitutes our trial ; and defeat the whole scheme of providence for the discipline and improvement of our virtue.

But though it be not possible for us to comprehend fully the nature and extent of the heavenly happiness ; yet the scriptures have given us some views of it suited to our present circumstances, and admirably fitted to promote our consolation and improvement. They assure us that the possession of it is attainable by every true Christian : they explain the means by which that possession may be infallibly secured : and they describe it in colours sufficient to ravish our hearts, and to inspire us with the most ardent desires after it. All the objects which attract our ambition on earth are employed by turns
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to warm our imagination, and to animate us in the pursuit of it. The saints who have finished their course with approbation are compared to kings returned from conquest, with palms of victory in their hands, and crowns of glory on their heads, clothed in the white robe of peace, seated on an everlasting throne, and enjoying a kingdom which cannot be moved. The country which they inhabit, fanned with the breath of perpetual spring, is a paradise of unceasing delight, and pours around them pure rivers of joy which shall never fail. Encircled with a society the most instructive and enchanting—with angels and the spirits of just men made perfect—with all whom they admired and loved and adored on earth, they shall behold the face of their Father in heaven, and advance in endless progression towards the attainment of his likeness. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no night there,*

there, for God will be the light of it ; and they shall reign for ever and ever.

This description is in many of its parts evidently figurative ; and gives us a vivid, and powerful, but a very imperfect representation of the heavenly glory. It exhibits to us things that are unseen and invisible by some analogy which they bear to *things that do appear*. But from the very nature of the case the analogy here must be feeble and imperfect. Our modes of enjoyment while in the body are so very different from those of a purely spiritual state, that one can be seen or represented through the other only in a very general and indistinct manner ; and therefore we should be careful not to carry the resemblance to points where it was not meant to apply. The similitudes employed on this subject in scripture seem to have been intended not so much for the purpose of defining the precise nature of the heavenly happiness, as for representing its value, and the effect which it ought to have on our desires. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be*—what shall be the precise description of our future bliss ; but this we know, from the analogies suggested by
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scripture, that it will be of inestimable value, and far more worthy of our pursuit than a crown or any other object of earthly ambition. We may even infer from them that the happiness of the future world will be like that of the present, adapted to the capacities of our nature ; that it will still be the happiness of men, but of men improved and exalted above the imperfections of our present condition, and qualified for scenes of pure intellectual and moral enjoyment.

This inference will lead us to a view of the future happiness of good men which is imperfect indeed and faint, but which will be more precise and correct than can be drawn from mere sensible and allegorical descriptions. We must abstract from it whatever is suited only to that part of our frame which is material and mortal ; we must exclude from it all the interruptions and limitations which the body and its frailties occasion ; and retain in our thought nothing but what belongs to the condition of a purified spirit, panting after higher attainments, freed from every obstruction to the exercise of its powers, and
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in circumstances the most favourable to their success. By this process of thought, we shall obtain a view of the heavenly happiness that will not be metaphorical, but real; and which will correspond precisely with the description given of it in the text. *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth, that is, from the time of their death; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

There are two circumstances in the condition of the blessed, mentioned here as constituting the ingredients of their happiness. They rest from their labours, and their works follow them. These circumstances we shall consider more particularly as they seem to comprise the amount of all the direct knowledge which we possess concerning the state of departed saints.

1. Those who die in the Lord, from the moment of their departure, rest from their labours, or, as it should have been translated, cease from their fatigues.

The word rest when applied to men is of ambiguous import. It sometimes signifies the total absence of all exertion—a
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state in which the activity of our powers is suspended, and we are altogether passive to impressions from surrounding objects. At other times it signifies merely a refreshment from fatiguing labour—a state in which our powers may be in full exertion, but directed towards a more attractive object, and relieved from the obstacles which formerly overpowered them. From this ambiguity have arisen important mistakes respecting the nature of the future happiness. In consequence of it, heaven has been often represented as a place of indolent contemplation—a state of passive enjoyment, where happiness flowed not from the mind itself, but from the delightful scenery by which it is surrounded—a beatific vision, something like a pleasing dream, in which, without any effort of ours, the most enchanting objects present themselves in succession to the senses, and hold the soul in a trance of rapturous amaze.

But this representation, however captivating, suggests to us a false and delusive view of the blessedness of heaven. For though we have reason to believe that a part of our future enjoyment will arise from

from impressions made on us by external objects ; yet it is inconsistent with all our notions of a happiness suited to human nature, and which is to be durable and progressive, to suppose that the whole of it, or any very considerable part of it will spring from this source. Life that does not manifest itself by action is scarcely an object of our experience : and a happy life without action cannot even be conceived. Inactivity is the death of the soul, and of all its joys. Accordingly we find that all the pleasures we taste on earth have an intimate connection with the exercise of those mental and bodily powers which God has given us ; and that one outward situation is more favourable to happiness than another, only in the proportion in which it gives opportunities for a more varied and unconstrained exertion of them. Whence, for instance, arise the superior enjoyments of a cultivated mind, but from the superior facility which it has acquired of directing its powers towards the objects on which they are fitted to operate ? What constitutes that perpetual satisfaction which fills the heart of him who is continually employed in doing

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ing good, but the successful exertion of his best talents in great and laudable pursuits? Nay, in what consists the happiness of God himself, but in the highest activity; in the unceasing exertion of those beneficent energies which preserve, and animate, and bless his creatures, guiding them, through action, to the fulfilment of their destination, and spreading life, and health, and joy, through the universe?

These considerations may be sufficient to satisfy us that the condition of good men in the future world will be a condition of unremitting activity. With powers highly exalted above those which they possess at present, and with far nobler objects to attract them, they will proceed with ceaseless steps towards higher and still higher degrees of knowledge and virtue without interruption and without end.—What then is that *rest* which is promised in scripture to the people of God, and which now sounds so sweetly to wayworn weary pilgrims upon earth? It is, as the original words of the text plainly import, deliverance from fatigue. They shall possess powers capable of unwearied application, and be
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placed in circumstances where nothing shall occur to impede or to annoy their exertion. Here they are subject to much weakness; to frequent defeats, to lassitude and sorrow. The body with its wants and its pains depresses their energy: the affections of the heart distract, and mislead, and embitter their exertion: the competitions of rivals, the malignity of enemies, and unforeseen difficulties in things themselves continually oppose their success, and beget weariness, disgust and disappointment. But in the future world all these obstacles shall be removed. Pain and sorrow and disappointment shall be felt no more. In the immeasurable kingdom of God they shall find an unexhausted field for the employment both of their intellectual and moral powers: they shall feel in themselves, in the scenes around them, and in the assistance and example of their companions, irresistible inducements to persevere: and God himself, with *the light of his countenance*, will cheer them in their path of glory. Supported by him they shall acquire new strength at every successive step; and rejoicing in hope, *they shall mount up with wings as ea-*

gles : they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

This view of the heavenly state, Christians, should correct our notions of earthly happiness, and lead us to expect it, not from indolence and monkish contemplations, but from the virtuous use of the faculties which God has committed to us. Even amid the difficulties of the present scene, we find their vigour increasing in proportion to the employment we give them, and gradually approaching to that exemption from fatigue which constitutes the first part of the blessedness of heaven. But to this virtuous exertion, we shall be still farther animated if we consider,

2. That our works shall follow us.

All the other acquisitions which we make on earth will leave us on the brink of the grave. Wealth and power and beauty shall drop from us with the body to which they were attached. Our works alone, our works of righteousness, and the virtuous dispositions from which they flowed, shall accompany us into the world of spirits to be the everlasting sources of our joy

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On this head I shall enter into no controversy with those who maintain that works done by us can have no influence on our salvation and happiness ; nor shall I spend your time in exposing the fallacies by which they endeavour to explain away the plain decisive language of the text before us. Their doctrine, if it be any thing at bottom, but a miserable perversion of words to delude the conscience of those who wish to attain heaven without forsaking their sins, is so absurd in itself, and so contradictory to every line of the gospel, that it can receive no indulgence from any man whose understanding is accessible to argument and rational conviction. It will be more for your edification to unfold the manner in which works contribute to promote the future happiness of the good. And this effect they produce both by furnishing delightful subjects for their reflection, and by qualifying them for the employments of their new abode.

Even in this world much of our happiness flows from the approbation of our own hearts. The gratulations of a good conscience on the recollection of a well spent life

life are sweet to the soul, and furnish to it a powerful support under all the outward evils that assail us. These gratulations, my virtuous brethren, must follow you while memory retains her power. They will rise with your departing spirit from the bed of death, and form a part of your heavenly treasure. The good actions you performed on earth—the wretched whom you pitied and relieved—the fatherless whom your protecting hand reared to industry and virtue—the resignation which you displayed in scenes of deep affliction—your virtuous stand against the overwhelming corruption of the times—and your generous sacrifices in the cause of God and your country—all these, recalled by remembrance, will enter with you into the land of souls. They will plead for you at the throne of your Judge; and though not strictly meritorious in themselves, though they cannot purchase heaven for you as a matter of right—they will soothe you with rapturous recollections; and obtaining, through Christ, the recompense of reward, they will prepare for you a happier mansion in the house of your Father.

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But our works have a still more important influence on our future happiness by qualifying us for the enjoyment of it. They have gradually formed within us the dispositions and powers which are then to operate unopposed, and by their exercise and the attainment of their objects, to constitute the chief part of the heavenly felicity.

The blessed at their admission into heaven do not enter on a condition that is altogether new to them and untried. It has a very intimate connection with the employments which occupied them on earth : It is merely a continuation of pleasures for the enjoyment of which they were here prepared ; and the transition to it is only one of those gradual steps by which they are destined to attain perfection. This earth is the place of their education. The powers which they cultivated here will be there exerted anew, in more favourable circumstances, and in a wider range, in proportion to the extent of their improvement ; and their affections will be purified, and directed to objects more worthy of them. The degree, therefore, of wisdom, of virtue, and of capacity which they attain here,

that is, the works which they have done on earth, will determine the nature and degree of the happiness which they shall receive in heaven. To use the illustration of Jesus in the parable, he whose pound hath here gained five pounds, shall there be made a ruler over five cities, and he whose pound gained ten, shall rule over ten cities.

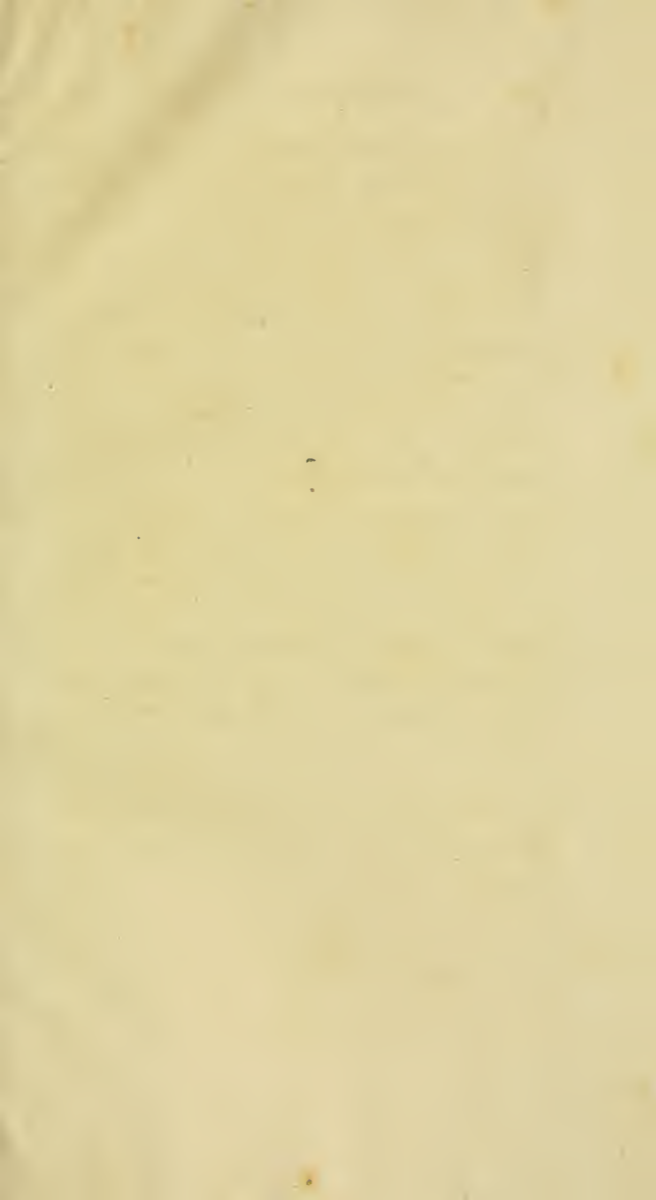
Separate not therefore, Christians, in your conception, things which are so indissolubly connected as this world and the next. Expect to reap nothing there, but what you have sown here. Regard the devout and virtuous pleasures for which you now acquire a relish as the elements of your future bliss; and the victories which you now gain over your passions and over the world, as the gems which shall adorn your crown of glory. God will give to every man according as his work has been. *To them who by a patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life*; and they who have been most distinguished by acts of humility and benevolence to their brethren—(Christ himself has said it) they who have humbled themselves as little children, and become as the
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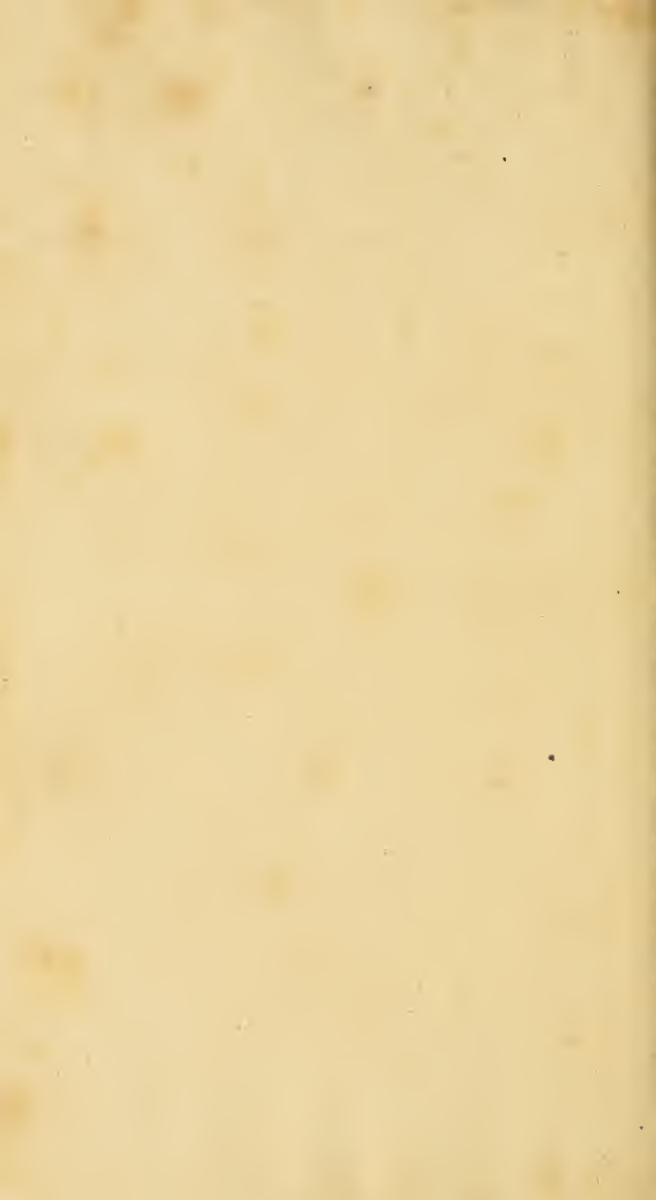
servants of all, will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

These considerations exhibit, in a striking light, the awful importance of this world and its employments. The scene in which you now act furnishes the exercises by which your faculties are to be sharpened and prepared for the services of immortality. In this view nothing which you do, or which you neglect, can be to you a matter of indifference. It is intimately connected with futurity, and has an influence more immediate or more remote on the final improvement or degradation of your nature. It is the bud which bears in its bosom either the wholesome or the poisonous fruit which future events will cherish to maturity for the life or the death of your souls. Let me therefore beseech you, Christians, to keep ever in your view the final result of things; and whether you engage in more solemn, or more ordinary occupations—whether you take your station at the table of your Lord, or pursue the business of your usual calling, to recollect that your present action may in itself, or by its consequences, involve the

decision of your everlasting fate. Under this impression, every event of your life will assume a new and more edifying aspect. The station which you occupy will appear the station assigned to you by the wisdom of heaven as the best fitted for the discipline of your talents. The affliction which chastens you for your profit will be welcomed as the messenger of your Father's love : the sacrifice required by virtue will seem light when viewed through the recompense of reward : and even the valley of the shadow of death will be regarded as the passage to your native home. You will feel on entering it the consolations of a good conscience : the staff of God will support you amid its terrors : and at its termination you will see written these animating words ; *Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth ; yea, saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.* Amen.

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